# Green Worlds An Informal Chronicle

Maurice Hindus

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PART ONE

# Birch

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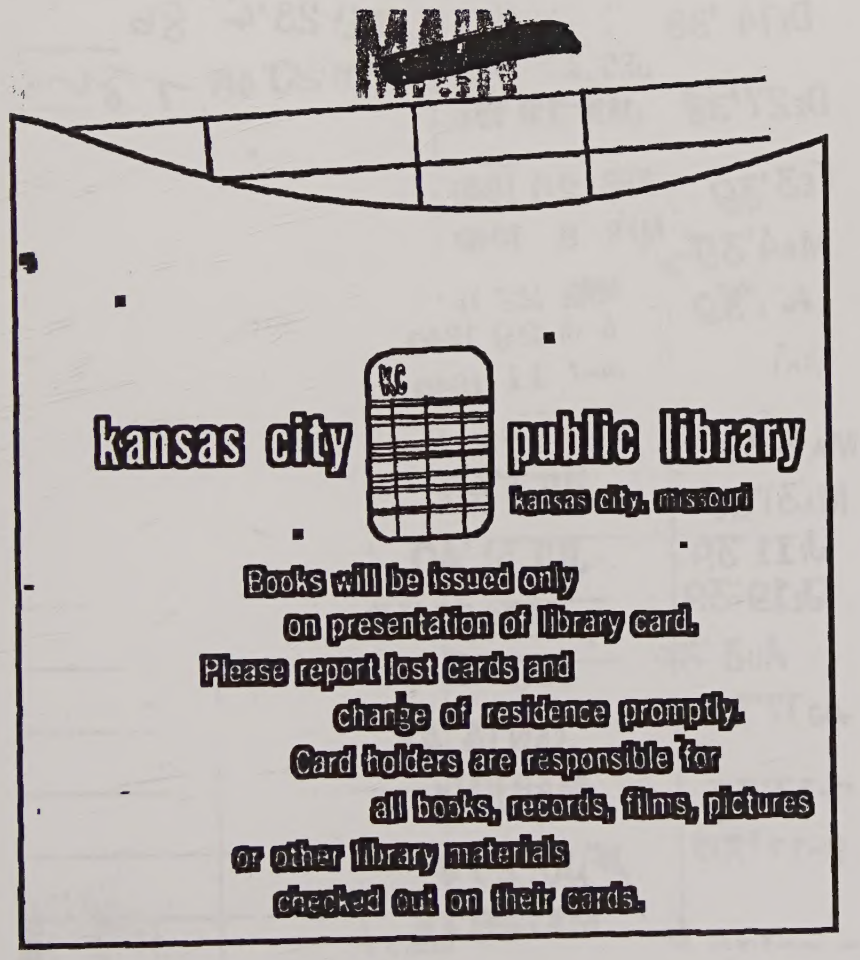
Green worlds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# GREEN WORLDS

BOOKS BY

## MAURICE HINDUS

GREEN WORLDS

MOSCOW SKIES

THE GREAT OFFENSIVE

RED BREAD

HUMANITY UPROOTED

BROKEN EARTH

THE RUSSIAN PEASANT
AND THE REVOLUTION

MAURICE HINDUS

# GREEN WORLDS

*AN INFORMAL CHRONICLE*

MCMXXXVIII
DOUBLEDAY, DORAN & COMPANY, INC.
NEW YORK

TO THE MEMORY OF

JIM

THE MOST IRASCIBLE FRIEND

THE MOST SENSIBLE TEACHER

THE MOST HUMANE AMERICANIZER

I HAVE EVER KNOWN

# Foreword

*On and off I have been writing this book for about twenty years. On and off, actually and in memory, I have been living it much longer. Had I been born in any other peasant village in European Russia than the one that was my home, I doubt whether in its main currents my life there would have been much different from what it was. Had I on my escape from New York gone to live in a sharecropping community in the cotton country or on one of the industrialized truck farms in the West, my American experience would, I am certain, have been vastly different from what it was. But then the very motive that prompted me into forsaking New York would have spurred me into forsaking a sharecropping community or an industrialized truck farm. I was in quest of the America that was not a denial but a fulfillment of the legends I had heard in my boyhood in the Russian village and of the expectations that they had aroused in me. Luckily, in its human relationships, Mount Brookville proved such a fulfillment, and though I have not lived there since I left it for college, I never go back for a visit but I feel as though it were still my home.*

*Mount Brookville of course is not the real name of the place. For obvious reasons I have given it and its people fictitious names.*

MAURICE HINDUS

# Contents


PART ONE

BIRCH

| CHAPTER | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| I | Father | 3 |
| II | Mother | 13 |
| III | Mud | 26 |
| IV | Adventure | 35 |
| V | The Evil One | 42 |
| VI | Girls | 53 |
| VII | America | 65 |
| VIII | Farewell | 77 |

PART TWO

ARID ZONES

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| IX | New York | 89 |
| X | Quest for the American Village | 99 |

PART THREE

PINE

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| XI | Mount Brookville | 115 |
| XII | The Hang of Things | 135 |
| XIII | "Higher Learning" | 149 |

CONTENTS


| CHAPTER | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| XIV | Bees and Woodchucks | 158 |
| XV | Jim | 171 |
| XVI | Neighbors | 188 |
| XVII | Elder Jepson | 204 |
| XVIII | The Evangelist | 226 |
| XIX | Girls | 241 |
| XX | Heinrich | 258 |
| XXI | Abner | 272 |
| XXII | Clem | 284 |
| XXIII | The Bountiful Harvest | 294 |

PART FOUR

TALL TIMBER

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| XXIV | The Trees and the Wood | 311 |
| XXV | Birch Again | 319 |
| XXVI | Pine Again | 341 |

PART ONE

# Birch

## CHAPTER I

### *Father*

FATHER WAS A KOOLAK; that is, he started out in life as a koolak, but of a kind of whom present-day Russia never has heard. He literally gave his shirt away, and not only his own, but those of others, chiefly of members of his family.

Perhaps the reader has seen Soviet pictures of village life made during the fierce days of the first Five Year Plan. Invariably the chief villain was a koolak—and what a villain! Body rolling in folds of fat, face a mask of diabolic intrigue, always snarling, shouting, drinking, gourmandizing, ravishing his young daughter-in-law or the young spouse of a helpless debtor, beating his wife and children, above all preying like a famished wolf on groveling and impoverished neighbors, he was an incarnation of the grossest monstrosities that an impassioned imagination could create.

Neither outwardly nor inwardly did Father resemble this man-made monster. He was neither fat nor robust. His back was bent, his face pale and bony, his shoulders round, his neck thin. He never lifted a sack of rye or potatoes but he puffed for breath. Once he had to carry a week-old calf from the barn to a wagon outside, and he collapsed under the load. Its tethers loosened, the calf scampered wildly across a field. Father never bothered to give chase. He couldn't run a block without pausing for breath and feeling his heart. Even when he set up sheaves of grain in the field he frequently stopped for rest. He could gather hay in bunches with a hand rake, but the moment he lifted a forkful his body trembled from the strain.

Of medium height, with a pointed light brown beard and large gray eyes he looked more like a scholar, which he was not, than a koolak. Meek and reticent, he rarely lifted his voice above a con-

versational tone. He was one of the lightest eaters I have known, and no one had ever accused him of casting covetous eyes on a neighbor's wife. If he ever caught a neighbor in our garden stealing cucumbers he sought to shame the man into repentance but did not bother to take away the stolen vegetables. He never raised a finger against his wife or any of his seventeen children. Once in a fit of exasperation Mother rushed at my younger brother and threatened to whip him. Instantly Father leaped forward, put himself between son and wife and said sorrowfully: "You'd better whip me."

He abhorred violence of any kind. I never knew him to say an angry word to an unruly horse or a kicking cow. His low baritone voice often disarmed an enemy of violent language. Once, angry at Mother because she wouldn't give me another piece of sugar for my bread, I ran out of the house crying. Father ran after me.

"Why are you crying?" he asked.

"Mother won't give me another piece of sugar."

"Will you stop if I give it to you?"

I nodded. He disappeared and soon returned with the coveted lump of sweet, which he had pilfered from the cupboard. He didn't mind disrupting Mother's effort to discipline us if that insured peace in the house.

However immense the troubles that tumbled on him from day to day, he seldom showed anger, and when he did he clenched his fists, pressed his lips together and sought to subdue the emotion. At most he would utter an oath under his breath. If a family quarrel started he hastened to act as mediator, and if he failed in the effort he fled from the house. He fled from any quarrel anywhere. He couldn't bear seeing people hurt each other or getting hurt and would rather suffer torment than humiliate or wound others.

Once my older brother had driven into the barn a neighbor's pig that had been rooting in our potato field. The neighbor came and demanded the release of the pig. My brother refused unless the man made good the damage to our potatoes. An altercation ensued, my brother and the neighbor blasting each other with fierce oaths. Thereupon Father took the peasant by the arm, went with him to the barn, let out the pig and told him to go *s bogom* (with God) and forget all thought of redress.

I often wondered how anyone could be as indifferent to food as

he was. If he had meat for dinner he ate it. If he had to go without meat for months he was no less content. If he sat down to a meal of only black bread and a cucumber, he never in any way indicated that he was displeased. If Mother was away and there was no one in the house to set a meal before him, he went without food and never murmured a word. When he felt unbearably depressed he sought refuge in vodka, and I never knew a man who had less right to indulge in the fiery beverage than he. One glass of it and he was gone, literally, to sober up in the haymow. He could sleep for hours after just one drink.

The chief social sin of the koolak was lending money and even more often grain, hay or straw to his poorer neighbor, who would be charged an exorbitant interest in cash, in kind and most commonly in labor to be performed in the future during the busy seasons in the field. So far as I know, Father never lent anyone a kopeck. He could not, because he was always broke and always in debt. In fact, I never had heard of a man in the whole countryside who had such a genius for involving himself in debt as he had. Confronted with an acute difficulty and desirous of escaping immediate unpleasantness, his first thought always was a fresh loan.

Yet while in his everyday manner he was the reverse of everything that a koolak was labeled, in an economic sense he was a member of that group. At one time he possessed ten horses, twenty cows, many calves, geese and hens, and he was the only farmer in the village who thrashed his grain, not with flails, but with a horse-drawn thrashing machine built of heavy timbers—the sole mark of the machine age in the community. Banned because of his Jewish faith from owning land except for a house and a garden, he rented a large acreage, the equivalent of about a section, from the noted Count Radzivill. Had he been an energetic and competent businessman with an eye for financial gain, he could have whipped a fortune out of Radzivill's land. As it was, the count's acres proved a stupendous liability and in the end ruined him and the family.

Father worked only a portion of the lands he rented. The remaining acres he let out on shares to neighbors. After a peasant who had rented a field from him had harvested his grain, Father would go out to collect his share of the crop. The peasant would take two sheaves, and Father would take one. The peasant would set up his

grain in little stacks, and Father would do likewise. Because of backward methods of tillage, primitive implements, the use of poor seed and lack of fertilizer, the crop was often a failure, especially if there was little rain during the growing season. If the peasant or his wife would start crying and say: "Oh, dear little brother, see how empty the ears are, how shrunken the kernels, how burned the straw! How are we going to keep ourselves and our family in bread this winter?" Father would motion with his hand and, without a word, walk off and leave all the sheaves for the peasant to take home. If Mother or someone else reminded him that his excessive good heartedness might result in his family being left without bread in winter, he would pull at his knuckles until they cracked and reply: "I can't take bread away from people."

Naturally enough, peasants often took advantage of him. Once Mother went to see a hayfield which a peasant had rented on shares. The hay was supposed to have been mowed, bunched and ready for dividing. Mother saw only a clear meadow, with a few solitary cocks of sour grass on the edge of the ditch that bordered the land. The peasant had secretly hauled home nearly all the hay. On returning from the trip she told Father what had happened and again reminded him of the ruinousness of his ways. Father listened, agreed that he had been treated unfairly and started for the house of the wily peasant to demand an explanation and redress. On the way he changed his mind Sidor, the soldier, the peasant in question, had a sharp tongue, and Father could not possibly go through with the altercation which was facing him. Besides, how could he tell a man that he was a charlatan, a thief or even a bad neighbor?

Father was one koolak who did not have to wait for the Revolution to liquidate him. With stupendous recklessness he achieved his own liquidation long before anyone but exiled intellectuals ever dreamed of a revolution in Russia.

From year to year he grew poorer and poorer. He sold one horse after another, one cow after another, to pay off debts and to meet his rentals. After Radzivill died, most of his lands were sold by the state. Father was now content with renting a small acreage. He had no more use for the thrashing machine and sold it to a neighbor. From day to day the food on our table grew more and more meager in choice. Meat disappeared, eggs disappeared, cheese disappeared,

butter disappeared. Only Father's indebtedness kept mounting, for he persisted in borrowing even when he had no more assurance that he could pay off his debts. When he could not borrow any more he would take a harness or a pillow to town and pawn it. Several times he pawned his own boots. We became so poor that the eggs which our own hens laid had to go to the market, and the butter which Mother churned likewise had to be sold. If Mother ever boiled an egg she cut it into four parts and gave each of the children only one. We ate our slice of egg with black bread, biting off a tiny morsel of the one with each big mouthful of the other so as to enable us to pack down plenty of bread. Butter we got only when we were sick, and sometimes I would deliberately rush out barefooted into the cold to get sick or just pretend sickness and then tease and cry for butter. We ate soup at every meal; indeed soup and black bread became the mainstays of our daily fare. In summer we walked barefooted, except on the Sabbath, and had it not been for the miracles which bald-headed Yevhim, the village cobbler, could perform with his awl and his waxed black thread, we should have been obliged to go barefooted even on the Sabbath. No matter how hopelessly dilapidated a shoe was, Yevhim could always contrive a way of holding it together for another month—or another year!

The one glimmer of light in our lives was the Sabbath. With irrepressible longing we waited for its arrival, and with overwhelming sorrow we mourned its departure. On the Sabbath we were sure of getting a slice of white bread at each meal and sugar for our tea and meat at least during one meal. The white bread was such a luxury now that we often ate it with black bread as we did the slice of egg with which Mother now and then surprised and delighted us.

Our poverty never dismayed Father. "Better times are coming, dear children," he would say. "God will bring them to us, just wait and see if He doesn't." Like Dickens' Micawber he never gave up hope of something turning up to deliver him and his family from ever-increasing want.

"When will we have butter?" I once asked him.

"Soon, very soon," was his confident reply.

"Will God give it to us?"

"Of course God will give it to us. Don't I pray to Him every day?"

I waited and waited, and when the promise failed of fulfillment I wondered what gross transgression Father had committed to deserve such unrelieved punishment. I thought God was inconsiderate, and began to defy Him in my own unbridled way. On the Sabbath I was not supposed to go to the fields. I began going to the fields every Sabbath. I was not supposed to climb over hedges lest I break the dry brush or the posts of which they were made. With mounting spite I took to climbing and jumping every hedge within my reach on our lands and on the lands of neighbors. I was elated with triumph every time I heard under my feet the crunching of a stick, and the louder the crunch the more certain was I that God heard it and the keener was my feeling of revenge.

"Let God know," I would say to myself, "that I'll go on breaking sticks on the Sabbath and sin in other ways as long as we have no eggs and butter at our meals."

Often, in my impassioned wish to exasperate and hurt God, I would run off to the woods and step with all my strength on every dry limb I saw, as though it were a venomous snake, or break it over and over across my knee.

"There now," I would say to myself, "I guess He'll do something, the old meany."

I carried my feud to the point of violating the Mosaic dietary laws. I wanted to violate them, anyway, so that I should have more fats in my food, and my grievance against God merely provided an excuse for the fulfillment of the wish. I gladly ate everything that any of our neighbors offered me. Once I said to Sergey, my closest chum and the son of Mother's closest friend:

"Fetch me a piece of your sausage."

'You mustn't eat it," he answered.

"Why not?"

"Your God forbids it."

"But your God doesn't?"

"No, my God lets me eat anything I want, except on fast days."

"I like your God better than mine," I assured him, "but don't tell Mother I said so."

Instead of keeping the secret to himself, Sergey mentioned it to

his mother, and his mother hastened to tell mine, and my mother decided it was time to put an end to my defiance of God. Father interposed and stationed himself between the two of us.

"No," insisted Mother, "this time he's got to be punished."

"But why must you do it?" Father supplicated.

"If I don't, who will?"

"What d'you mean, who? Isn't God keeping a record of all my sins, and since the boy isn't old enough to be confirmed, aren't his sins added to mine? I'll be lashed a lot for my wicked deeds, and a few more strokes won't matter."

"Do you really mean it, Father?" I asked. "God will lash you for my sins?"

"Of course He will."

I was not reconciled to God, but pity for Father moved me to bring my rebellion to an immediate end.

The poorer we grew the more irresponsible Father became. Once Mother fatted two calves and sold them. When she went to collect the money she was informed that it had already been paid to her husband. Father had said nothing to her of the collection. When she asked him what he did with the money, he confessed that part of it he had used to pay off a debt and part to buy vodka in the bazaar to drink with neighbors.

Whenever a beggar stopped at our house, Father saw to it that he got the best food we had, better than we ate If Mother had eggs or butter that she was saving for the bazaar, he would ask her to share them with the beggar. To him a beggar was a ward of God, and he would not offend God by withholding from His ward anything that he might have in the house. It was well enough to deny things to himself and to his children, but not to a beggar. Naturally I came to regard a beggar as the most privileged person in the world. Merely by being what he was he could command in our house the best of food and shelter. Only the constable or some other uniformed official might be similarly pampered by Mother and Father, and not out of respect or reverence, like a beggar, but out of fear or abasement. Once Mother set before a passing constable a jar of honey which she had received as a gift from a neighbor. Honey was so precious a delicacy that a thin spread on a thick slice

of bread brought shouts of glee from old and young in the family. The constable dipped endless slices of bread into the jar, and after he had eaten all the honey he wiped clean with his fingers the sides of the vessel. When he was gone there was grumbling and weeping in the house, and Mother pronounced on him a formidable curse. Yet, had it been a beggar who had made away with the whole jar of honey, she would have scolded us for grumbling and weeping. I envied beggars more than I did the merchants, the lumbermen and the other well-to-do people who passed through our villages, and I resolved that when I grew up I would be a beggar.

One of the men who frequently visited our village was a Jewish peddler by the name of Passover. He sold wagon grease, not for money, but for flax, rye, barley, linen and other home produce. A huge man with a thick and tangled red beard and a perpetual scowl on his lofty brow, he always wore the same long black gaberdine with the corners lifted to the waist and so shiny with grease that from a distance it gleamed like a mirror. Holding the lines in both hands, he would walk beside his horse and intone solemnly in a loud rasping voice, "Wa-a-a-a-a-gon gre-e-e-e-e-ase!" The words, as they boomed out of him, seemed a combination of a wail, a chant, a threat, a promise, an incantation that could be heard from one end of the village to the other. Once Passover tried to sell gingersnaps, raisins, sugar, doughnuts, but because his wagon, his hands, his clothes reeked of grease nobody would buy them. In despair he abandoned all hope of ever being anything else but a peddler of wagon grease.

Whenever a peasant came out with a little wooden tub to buy grease, Passover would stop his horse, pull the bung out of the barrel in the rear, measure off with a black tin can the amount that was ordered, press the bung back into the barrel and pound it in with his heavy booted foot so as to prevent possible leakage. The drops on the rim of the barrel he would scoop up with his fingers and scrape into the measuring can. Never did he allow a particle of the precious substance to go to waste. On finishing a transaction he would wipe his hands on his greasy coat and thus enhance its black luster.

To the children of the village, Passover was an object of fun and dread. His tangled red beard, greasy hands, gigantic stature, ineradicable scowl and shiny gaberdine with the lifted corners made them think of him as of a creature not of this world. Among themselves they whispered that if ever he laid his hand on anyone's cheek the spot would remain black with grease to the end of that person's life. That was why they ran from possible contact with him. Often enough they braved themselves to chase after him, shout nicknames, throw mudballs, and run when they saw him turn.

One late afternoon, as Passover was leisurely driving through the village, intoning his offer of wagon grease, a playmate of mine sneaked over to the rear of the barrel and pulled out the bung. The thick oil gave a spurt and poured to the ground in a gleaming black streak that made one think of a wriggling snake. Walking beside the horse, with his eyes ahead, Passover knew nothing of the catastrophe until a peasant shouted to him to plug up the hole in the rear of the barrel. Passover turned, and his heart sank with anguish. The grease had all run out, and only a thin trickle oozed down. The boy who had caused the damage had disappeared, and no one knew who or where he was. In an effort to retrieve the lost treasure, Passover knelt down and started scooping the grease with his hands. It was no use—the mixture of dirt made it unfit for use. His whole fortune lay before his eyes and was utterly wasted. He cursed the hand that pulled the plug, cursed and cursed, and then, shaking with sobs, he drove to our house, stretched out on the floor and cried pitifully: "What 'll I do now—what 'll the children say when I come back without flour for bread, what 'll my wife say—oh, what 'll she say, the unfortunate woman!" He was pathetic beyond words—this huge man with his immense shoulders, his red beard and his wind-chapped face smudged with grease and tears, as helpless as a beaten and prostrate child

Instantly Father rose to the emergency. Taking Passover by the hand, he helped him to his feet and said, "Come with me, Passover, and don't worry." He led Passover to the barn where Mother had stored two sacks of rye that she was expecting to haul to the windmill and grind into flour. "Here," said Father, bringing down one of the sacks and making an effort to drag it toward Passover, "take

it along and say nothing to your wife or mine." Passover cried with gratitude.

When Mother learned what had happened she said nothing. She had worked hard to obtain those two sacks of rye, and now one of them was gone—two weeks' bread for the family gone as if burned to ashes! She cried with grief.

King was the name of another Jewish peddler who made regular rounds of our village. He sold dry goods, hairpins, combs, earthenware, calico, ribbons, gingersnaps, sugar, and like Passover he often stopped with us for the Sabbath. Away from home, continually trudging through village mud, never carrying spare clothes, both men were always unkempt and grimy. Invariably Father had to argue with them before they would join us at the table for meals, for in spite of our poverty Mother never failed to have a clean white cloth on the table for the Sabbath, and both King and Passover never failed to soil it. One particularly lean Sabbath both men arrived unexpectedly. Mother had baked less white bread than ever and had cooked just enough meat to give us the flavor of a feast. On the arrival of the unexpected guests she was heartbroken. How could she feed them? But Father was cheerful. Guests had come, and they at least should know there was Sabbath on earth. To avoid arguing with them about sitting at the table, he picked up a handful of dust and smeared it over the white tablecloth. "See how dirty it is?" he said to the visitors. "You can't possibly make it dirtier. Come, good men, sit down and enjoy your Sabbath repast." Everything that Mother had put on the table he passed to them, he never touching a mouthful, and when they protested that they felt awkward in eating alone, Father jubilantly replied: "Don't you worry about us. When you finish we'll sit down and eat, there's plenty more, I tell you."

From the top of the brick oven in full view of the table we watched the visitors make away with our precious white bread and our meat and our meat-flavored soup, and with all our hearts we wished that in crossing the bridge both men had crashed into the river and stayed there. When they finished their meal and left the house for their wagons, in which they always slept, we started crying, and Father was torn with dismay and heartache. "Don't weep, children," he consoled us. "Next week you shall have lots and

lots of white bread and more meat than you've ever eaten, fat meat —shan't they, Mother?" But the next Sabbath we had no meat at all—only bones in our soup.

The poorer we grew and the more irresponsible and broken Father became, the more often he sought solace in vodka and refuge in the haymow.

Once Mother sent me to the barn to wake him and tell him to come home. I found him fast asleep. Pale, withered, his mouth half open, his eyes half shut, he lay curled up like a child, with his arms stuck in the hay as though it were something to which he could cling without fear of betrayal or collapse. I had not the heart to wake him. What would he do when he was awake? His health was wrecked, and he could not help Mother dig potatoes or even haul an armful of wood into the house. He might only have to face a freshly arrived creditor or listen to Mother's lament over the empty grain bin or the lack of bran with which to sprinkle the tub of water-soaked chaff for the cow, or other domestic catastrophes. He might as well sleep, poor soul!

No, it wasn't his fault that we were so poor, it was nobody's fault. Like Stepan the Fisherman, Trofim the Hawk, Boris the Cattle, we were poor because some people had to be poor, just as some people, like the neighboring landlord, the passing merchants, the lumbermen, the parish priest, had to be rich. That was the law of nature, of man, of God, as irrevocable as the law that caused the ice in the river to break up in spring and the roads to turn into mud after a rain. Only why did my father have to be like Stepan the Fisherman, Trofim the Hawk, Boris the Cattle, and not like the neighboring landlord, the passing merchants and lumbermen, the parish priest, whose magnificent orchard alone could keep us not only in bread but in meat and in butter?

## CHAPTER II

### *Mother*

SHORTLY AFTER MY FATHER DIED I was returning home from school for my Christmas vacation. The winter was one of the severest we had had. Roads, fences, shrubs were buried in snow. Not only the

silvery birch but the dusky pine as well was clad in white armor. The air crackled with frost. The neighbor with whom I traveled and I walked or ran beside the sled to keep warm. The horse's face was white with frost, and so were our clothes and the straw in the sled. The full moon and the endless sweep of snow made the night so brilliant that we had the illusion of being out in dazzling daylight. I know of nothing more beautiful than the moonlit winter nights in the Russian countryside.

All the way we heard the barking of homeless dogs, and now and then the howling of a wolf. Every time I heard a wolf I walked close to my companion, for this was the time of the year when wolves were supposed to be most desperate, and Father's death, together with my first separation from home, had so unstrung me that I became an easy prey to dread premonitions. Suppose a wolf, or a pack of wolves, attacked us? We had no gun, nothing more deadly than the driver's whip, which was made, not of leather with a piece of lead at the end like the whip of a gypsy, but of a slender birch rod and a not too stout piece of rope. I asked the driver what he would do if a wolf started toward us. "I'd strike a match," was his instant and cheerful reply, "and the old devil would run for his life." It was the common belief of our peasants that wolves were so afraid of fire that they fled at the sight of it, even the feeble flame of a match. At the moment I had no faith in this weapon of defense, and I hoped that we should not need to put it to a test.

Finally I arrived home. Our house as usual was crowded with peasants. Our living room was the largest in the village, and the central location of our house made it a convenient gathering place for young and old. Besides, since the death of my father, people knew that their presence was cheering to the bereaved family and were therefore all the more eager to spend their leisure hours with us. Usually in winter only men came, for only they were idle evenings; the women were busy spinning and weaving.

When I entered the house my nose and hands were so cold that two men fetched snow and for a long time rubbed it over my face and hands. Then, after washing in cold water, I was ready for food. While I ate, the peasants bombarded me with questions about the news I had heard in town. They stayed late, and it was cheering to be with them, for the storm outside was gathering force, and the

howling wind and the whining dogs in the near-by wood made me a little shivery. When the neighbors left, Mother and I sat up and talked for a while and then got ready to retire. I blew out the light in the hanging lamp and crawled under a sheepskin covering a bench that Mother had placed alongside the warm bricks of the wood stove. Hardly had I shut my eyes when there came a violent pounding at the door. I jumped out of bed, went to the door and inquired who it was.

"Open, you little swine," came a surly reply, followed by a fresh onslaught on the door.

"Who is it?" I demanded impatiently. Without ceasing his pounding, the stranger shouted fiercely:

"Open, you son of an unholy mother, or I'll smash the door and slit your unholy guts out of you."

Frightened, I ran to tell Mother that a drunken man was threatening to break into the house. Mother arose and, advancing to the door, said angrily:

"Stop your pounding, you drunken wretch, what do you want?"

"I want to come in," came the surly voice, which was accompanied by another assault on the door. On recognizing the voice, Mother instantly changed her manner and said apologetically:

"Ah, it's you, Nikifor. Why didn't you say so? Of course I'll let you in." Quickly she unbolted the door, and I hastened to crawl under cover.

Nikifor! The name stirred me to infinite panic, and I wondered how Mother could calmly say, "Of course I'll let you in." Nikifor was the terror of the countryside—of peasants as well as of officials. He had robbed barns, windmills, shops. He had set houses afire, beat up people who were in his way, and rumor had it that he had committed murder. Even the *ispravnik*, police commissioner of the district, feared his wrath and his vengeance and never dared molest him, no matter how loud and violent were the complaints against the bandit.

His chief associate was a woman by the name of Alexandra. Time and again I had seen her at the bazaar walk into a booth or shop, lift a handful of raisins, sugar, ribbons or beads, and neither the clerks nor the keepers proffered a word of censure or objection. They knew the danger of rousing her enmity. Like

Nikifor she would not hesitate to set fire to the shop or the house of a man against whom she nourished a grudge. Uncommonly handsome, with flushed cheeks, flaxen hair, blue eyes, she easily attracted men in taverns, but never heeded the attentions of those who did not impress her as being affluent She would pick the pockets of her admirer and if he was excessively drunk she would walk off with his fur coat.

Once only had I seen her and Nikifor worsted in battle. It was late in summer at the bazaar during one of the big fairs. Traders from all over the province and from other provinces had gathered to sell their wares. Nikifor sauntered by a booth that was selling leather goods. A shiny whip with a leather woven handle and a tassel stirred his fancy, and nonchalantly he reached for it and walked off. The keeper was a Great Russian from the north. A burly man, with huge mustaches and powerful arms, he rushed out and demanded payment for the whip. In reply Nikifor struck him a violent blow on the back with it. Enraged, he swung out with his enormous fists and felled Nikifor to the ground.

Great Russians who traveled round bazaars were noted fighters. Instantly a crowd gathered to watch the battle. Alone, Nikifor was helpless. Whenever he made an effort to rise, the Great Russian would strike out, and Nikifor would tumble to the ground. Suddenly Alexandra and several of her associates appeared. They leaped on the Great Russian and pummeled him with their fists and feet, as is the habit of peasants when they fight. Other Great Russians rushed to their countryman's defense. Desperate fellows, knowing nothing of Nikifor and caring still less, they picked up rocks and, to the universal delight of the spectators, battered away at Nikifor, Alexandra and their aids. Alexandra ran for shelter, but the bandit stood his ground fearlessly. Wallowing in mud, his head and face soaked in blood, he fought on, though mostly with his tongue now, threatening to cut the throat of every Great Russian there.

The constable finally broke up the fight, and the Great Russians shut their booths and went for cover to the inn at which they were stopping. Snarling threats and curses, Nikifor staggered in pursuit, all alone, and when he reached the inn and found the door locked and bolted on the inside he pounded away with his fists and feet.

When it failed to open, he smeared it all over with his blood. I stood near him and saw him dip his fingers in his blood-soaked hair and wipe the blood on the door. He was so hoarse from shouting that his voice had become a mere whisper, yet he kept up his barrage of oaths and threats to cut the throat of every Great Russian at the bazaar. Finally Alexandra came and led him away.

And now this desperate man was in our house, drunk and surly, and I the only man at home and only ten years old!

Mother lighted the lamp, and, staring at me with his vengeful eyes, Nikifor growled:

"You foul little devil, you wouldn't open the door for me," and he shook his burly fist. "If it wasn't for my respect for your mother, I'd show you a thing or two, you dirty little swine."

"Stop, Nikifor," said Mother. "I don't like you to frighten a son of mine. Lean against the oven and warm yourself. A terrible storm, isn't it?"

Contemptuously Nikifor replied:

"That's not my way of getting warm."

Drawing from his pocket a red-labeled quart bottle of vodka, the strongest made, he asked for a glass. Mother fetched a small tumbler. Angrily he flung it to the floor, broke it and cried:

"A glass, I said, a real glass, a tea glass."

With no word of censure for breaking the tumbler, Mother hastened to fetch a large glass.

"Hold it a minute."

Drawing the sleeve of his coat over the palm of one hand, with the other he lifted the sealed bottle high over his head and smote the bottom with all his strength on the cloth-covered palm. Whistling, the cork flew to the ceiling and fell to the floor. Mother handed him the tea glass and, after filling it to the brim, he offered it to her and said gruffly:

"Drink, to your health."

Mother refused.

"Drink," he insisted. "You can't refuse when I offer it to you."

Mother said she never drank, and besides she was in mourning and in no mood for vodka.

"If you drain this glass," Nikifor expostulated hotly, "you'll never know you are in mourning."

Still Mother refused. With a gesture of disgust he turned his back toward her and, lifting the glass, downed every drop of its fiery contents. Mother fetched a tray of bread and salt and, dipping the one into the other, he ate a few mouthfuls. Then, setting the glass and the bottle on the table, he said:

"Where d'you suppose I come from?"

"How should I know?"

"You might guess."

Mother shrugged her shoulders.

"Then I'll tell you," he said. "This morning, in passing the windmill in the village of T———, I saw strings of teams loaded with grain. 'Aha,' I said to myself, 'by night the mill will be stuffed with rye. I must stop in on my way back.' I went to town, did my shopping, and on my return I stopped in and loaded my sled with sacks of rye, and do you know what I want to do with it?"

"I'd rather you wouldn't tell me," said Mother.

"I've got to tell you," he shouted, "because I want to make you rich."

"No, Nikifor, I don't want any of your rye. Please don't offer it to me."

"What d'you mean, you don't want it? How can you refuse anything I'm offering you? You're a widow, aren't you? You have a large family, haven't you? You need money, don't you? How can you get money more easily than taking my rye and selling it and paying me later, a month or a year from now, and much less than you get from the grain merchants? Don't you see that I am the best friend you have in the world?"

"Thanks, Nikifor," Mother answered. "I can't think of getting rich that way!"

"Why not? What's wrong with it? It's mine, isn't it? I'll dump the sacks in your grain bin, and you needn't pay me a kopeck now. When you sell it you can give me my share, one half or one third of what you get, or less if you wish. You can't get rich any easier, can you?"

Trembling with fear, Mother still shook her head.

He laughed contemptuously and, fixing his eyes on me, he exclaimed:

"Tell your mother she is a fool!" Turning to her, he went on tempestuously: "Are you afraid of the police?"

"Of course I am."

"But I'll protect you, and if the rascals molest you, I'll make them regret it the rest of their foul lives. You know they fear me worse than a dog fears a knotted stick."

Mother nodded.

He refilled his glass and again offered it to Mother, and when she refused, he set it angrily on the table, spilling half of it. Unsteady now, he wobbled around the room, and his immense shoulders with the huge sheepskin coat over them stretched into the proportions of a mighty wall, which made him look like a monster of inordinate physical power. Coming close to Mother, he said:

"Tell me, d'you ever hear people say anything about the constable in the village of S—— who was found dead in a snowbank some time ago?"

"People talk about it," answered Mother, "but I never pay any attention to their words."

"D'you know who killed him?"

Mother shook her head.

"Then I'll tell you."

"Please don't! I don't want to know anything about it," Mother protested in terror.

"Hush," he commanded, "don't talk to me like that. If I want to tell you who killed the cursed devil, you have no right to say you don't want to listen. D'you understand?"

"But I don't want to hear it. I am not interested," Mother pleaded.

"Hush, I say," he demanded, violently slapping the table with his enormous hand.

Another pause, and then he went on:

"You see, the bastard had been bragging all over the countryside that his three-year-old stallion was the finest horse anyone ever saw in our parts, and so I said to myself, 'What right has a loon of a constable to own the finest horse around here? I am as good at taking care of horses as anybody, constable, landlord or the very devil.' So I decided to appropriate the horse and stop the bastard

once for all not only from bragging but from breathing. So what d'you suppose I did? Late one night, when I knew he was home alone, my comrades and I drove up to his house, made our way inside and found the bastard spread out on his bed snoring like a pig. We tightened a soaped rope round his neck, and he never had a chance to give another snore."

Horrified, Mother turned away her face, but Nikifor jerked her angrily by the chin and demanded that she look him straight in the eyes.

"Then we dumped his body into our sled, led his horse out of the barn, hitched it on the outside of our sled and drove off. When we came to a high snowbank we dumped the foul carcass, and now the horse is on the way to the city of Tambov, in Great Russia, where people appreciate good horses more than they do here, and we'll get a fancy price for it, more than I ever got for any horse."

He paused. Mother was pale with horror, and I could feel her hands trembling on my body. I was shivering, too. Then Mother braved herself to ask if he did not think it was time for him to leave, so she could get some sleep, as she had to get up early and attend to her work. Absorbed in his own thoughts, Nikifor made no answer. Then, pulling out of his pocket a large penknife, he opened the long blade and flashed it back and forth, admiring its shiny steel surface.

"See this?" he said, running his thumb over the sharp edge.

"Put it away, I don't want to see it," said Mother.

"You don't? Well then"—he paused; then, putting the dull edge of the blade to his own throat and drawing it menacingly back and forth, he went on—"if you breathe a word of anything you've just heard, I'll do this to you." Vengefully he kept on drawing the blade back and forth across his throat.

Mother shut her eyes and drew back, but he insisted that she look at him. "Not a word, d'you understand?"

Mother shook her head, and Nikifor put away the knife.

"And I'll set your house afire, too, and you won't have any shelter at all for your foul brats."

After another long pause he said:

"What about emptying the rye in your barn?"

"No, Nikifor, I don't want it."

"You fool, I'll make you rich."

Vigorously Mother shook her head.

"I'd rather be poor," she said.

"The devil with you, you fool!" he muttered angrily and staggered out of the house.

During her long life in the village Mother had faced many an ordeal, but never, so far as I can remember, anything so immediately horrifying as this encounter with the most desperate bandit in our countryside. I can see her now as she stood there, her massive black hair, with not a touch of gray, held loosely in a knot and falling over her temples, a black shawl over her shoulders, and yet only now and then betraying the horror that she must have felt as she listened to him and watched him draw the dull edge of the knife back and forth across his throat as a threat of what he would do if she divulged his secret. She was in her late forties at the time, the mother of eleven children, of whom nine were alive. She had buried a daughter and her husband only a short time before and yet not for an instant did she grow hysterical or weep or even lose her temper. She seemed like one of those mighty birches in our wood—lashed by wind and rain, swept by frost and blizzard, and yet remaining upright and beautiful.

After Nikifor had gone she bolted the door, sat down beside me and talked to me for a few minutes to allay my fears. Then she stood up on a bench, reached for the hanging lamp, blew out the light and went to her bed. I lay awake for a long time, sobbing a little, not from fright, but from a new admiration for this lonely, overburdened and heroic peasant woman who was my mother.

Father was married when he was fourteen years old; that is, his father and the father of the girl he married had arranged the match, and the two became man and wife. His first wife bore him six children, and at the time of her death, though still under forty, he was already a grandfather, since his oldest son was the father of two children.

At that time Father was a man of some reputation in this murky part of the far-stretching Russian world. He lived in the largest house in the village—the only one with a shingled roof, with four rooms, two large and two small, instead of only the spacious living

room and the dark storage room which even the richest koolaks owned. Two of the rooms had board floors, and once a year in the spring, on the eve of Passover, Father had the house whitewashed. He was also the only man in the village who had two ovens in the house—one in the kitchen for cooking and one built of glazed green brick and gleaming with cheery brightness to supply heat for the living room and the bedroom. Nor was there another family that had beds. Father had two—one for himself and one for Mother. The children slept on the floor, on benches, on tables and in winter on the top of the ovens. Usually our peasants slept on a *polati,* a raised platform which served as a family bedroom, and when the family was so large that not all its members could stretch out on it, the floor, the table, the benches in the living room or in the storeroom were used for sleeping purposes. The ancient white-faced clock on the wall, the only timepiece in the village, added to Father's prestige. Of course he too kept hens in the house, in a dark cavern underneath the oven, and in winter he often sheltered a calf or a sheep in the living room. But he never walked barefooted and always wore leather boots. Besides, he counted in his barns more cows and horses than did any of his neighbors. To an outsider who did not know how heavily overmortgaged his properties were, he could easily pass for a rich man, almost a landlord.

A man of his standing, though a widower with five living children and already a grandfather, did not need to remain long without a wife, provided his health was good, and sometimes even if it was not Fathers of attractive daughters of marriageable age were only too eager to embrace him as a son-in-law. Therefore Father was beset by offers of marriage.

Mother lived in a village about twenty versts away. She had never seen Father but had heard of him, since his first wife was her cousin. Her own father was a struggling artisan, married to a second wife, with a large brood of children and eager to marry off his oldest daughter, as she had already attained her nineteenth birthday. A pretty girl with a mass of gleaming black hair, large brown eyes overhung by heavy lashes and finely curved brows, and with a delicately molded face, she had no dowry to offer, and therefore only poor working people courted her. Her stepmother was even more eager than her father to see her married, because then there

would be one less person in the family to feed and clothe, and if she was the wife of a man of means, which Father outwardly appeared to be, it would be an advantage to her and to her family. When Father saw the girl he instantly decided that she was the woman he wanted, and before long she was his wife.

After a few days in her new home, Mother discovered with a pang that, instead of being the man of means he was reputed to be, her husband was fast slipping into bankruptcy and ruin, and, what was more, his excessive kindliness and prodigious incompetence were no guarantee of future well-being. His children were unkempt and unclean, and his large house was sodden with neglect. Many of his fields lay idle; he had not bothered to rent or to cultivate them. Above all, creditors kept coming and shouting for payment, and it grew increasingly necessary for him to dispose of his livestock in order to meet partially his endless obligations.

Quickly enough Mother realized that marriage had not delivered her from adversity. But then . . . Father loved her and she loved him, and both were flattered by the talk of the village that she was the prettiest woman that had come there from the outside, so she hoped for the best. When she spoke to her husband of his debts and his incompetence, he assured her that she had nothing to worry about, because in the autumn, after he had sold his crops, he should have more money than he would need, money to spare and even to make loans to others. Of course it was all talk, for when autumn came and the crops were sold the sum was so meager that, instead of liquidating old debts, Father had to contract fresh ones.

Meanwhile children kept arriving with unrestrained regularity. There was neither a physician nor a *feldsher* (healer) in our village, but only a *babka,* an older peasant woman who was a self-taught midwife. Father thought that the *babka* in a neighboring village was a more competent midwife than the one in our own, and whenever Mother was to have a baby, he drove over and came back with his favorite *babka.* A thin wizened woman, with most of her teeth gone, but with strong hands and a decisive manner, this *babka,* like all the others in the countryside, knew nothing of hygiene and sanitation, and the only antiseptics she used were hot water and coarse soap. The umbilical cord she cut with a kitchen knife, and

if the knife was coated with herring juice or brine, she never stopped to wash it, but merely wiped it on her none too clean apron. A healthy woman, after a few days of rest she was on her feet again, ready to resume her many duties in the house and on the land.

I doubt that there was another woman in the village who shouldered as heavy a burden as she did. An indefatigable worker, she did not shrink from any task, however hard or odious. She fetched armfuls of firewood from the yard, pails of water from across the street, and loaded and unloaded sacks of grain and potatoes like a man. She did her own housework, the cleaning, the cooking, the mending and the sewing. A skilled gardener, she worked day after day in the hot sun, and her cucumbers were the envy of all our neighbors. She wielded a hoe, a spade, a rake, a pitchfork with equal dexterity. She milked cows and fed them and churned the cream into butter and dried the clabber into cheese and drove to the windmill with sacks of grain and journeyed to the market place to buy what groceries she could with the money she received from the sale of her produce. Alone or with the help of my sisters, when they were old enough, she walked to the river with a load of the family linen on her shoulders and washed it there, sometimes using yellow sand for soap. In summer, when the weather was dry, she made us sweep the street in front of our house and sprinkle it with freshly dug yellow sand. The floors in the house she likewise frequently sprinkled with sand.

She had had little schooling, and the only book she read, usually on the Sabbath when she did no work in the field, was the Old Testament. Yet she had an exalted regard for learning, all learning, whether religious or secular. If a Jewish beggar happened to be also a scholar of the Talmud, she felt especially honored in having him visit us. Blind Sergey and Sak Prohory, the two best-educated peasants in the village, the only ones who could open any Russian book and start reading it, always commanded her utmost admiration.

When, therefore, I became of school age, she decided that, however poor we might be and however dismal the prospect of improvement in the family affairs, she would keep me in school. There would be at least one scholar in the family to compensate her in

her advancing years for the toil and misery she had endured. Nor was I unwilling. I rebelled only at the study of Hebrew subjects, chiefly because I loathed the teacher. An elderly man with a stooping back and a toothless mouth, he had a passion for spanking pupils on their bare behinds. At the least show of waywardness he would summon them for punishment. For me, fresh from the village and utterly unused to such abasement, his command was only an invitation to disobedience. The first time he summoned me to stretch myself across his knees and to receive the usual dozen strokes with his foul leather belt, I never moved from my seat. He had reckoned without the fighting spirit I had developed in climbing trees, raiding orchards and swimming over our "devil's hole," and there was no more hazardous adventure for any boy in our village than that. I was ready for battle, and when I saw him start toward me I threw a small table at him with all my strength. He reeled and fell to the floor. Roused to fury, he jumped up and rushed toward me. I pushed another table at him and fled from the room. I never went back. Instead, I entered a Russian public school. Mother was not displeased with the change I made, particularly as it was a good school and there was no tuition fee.

She hired a lodging for me with an elderly couple and supplied me with food from home. Once a week—on Thursday if the weather permitted; if not, on some other day—she came to visit me and brought me enough food to last a week. As we no longer had a horse and as she could not afford to hire a team, she walked whenever she could not get a ride with a neighbor who might be going to the town.

She always stayed long enough to wash my head with soap and hot water and mend my clothes if they needed mending and have me change into fresh linen. Then she returned home. Staff in hand, with a sack on her back, a dark shawl over her head, her face bitten by cold or lashed by rain, she never missed a week. Alone, and with only her staff as a protection, she trudged across fields, where there was less mud, or through heavy snowbanks, avoiding the forest where she could, but going through it if she had to, and with no fear, even on dark nights, of the prowling dogs or the wolves.

Once in autumn she arrived in town with her clothes drenched with rain and her boots black with mud. She had walked all the

way with the heavy pack on her back and had run into a storm.

"Why do you do it, Mother?" I said. "I'd just as soon go home and stay there."

"Anything," she answered with vigor, "to save at least one of you from the village mud and the village darkness."

## CHAPTER III

## *Mud*

OUTWARDLY THERE WAS NOTHING about our village to stir esthetic or pleasurable sensations. Hardly any trees, lawns or flowers graced the courtyards. Nowhere any pavement or sidewalks; everywhere the same log hovels with the same thatch roofs and the same puny windows, the broken panes stuffed with straw, flax, horse manure or anything else that promised to keep out wind and rain; only occasionally a dab of paint—white, red, green—on the outside shutters or on the window frames; on cloudy days the grayness of roofs and log walls fused with the grayness of air and sky into an ocean of dull mist.

Facing every house in the street was a manure pile with pigs and hens around it or on top rooting and scratching for food. In summer there was hardly a household without a dog, and I do not remember a single friendly dog in the whole village. They seemed like an incarnation of the evil spirit that ruled so much of our life. Hardly a pedestrian but had to shout or throw mud and sticks to keep them at a safe distance. They barked furiously, and they were always ready to bite. In winter, when every potato and every crust of bread counted, poor people and others, too, drove them from their yards and their homes, and when they were whipped too severely they ran away and never returned. Homeless, they wandered in the fields and the woods alone or in packs, preyed on forest animals and on anything else that crossed their path. Not a night in winter but we heard their dismal barking and howling. By spring they often got so wild that they had to be shot.

Hardly a day went by without quarrels in the village. A man stole a sheaf of grain from a neighbor or pastured his horse on the

edge of a neighbor's meadow; a woman stole a cucumber in a garden; a plowman shaved off a "sliver of land" from the ridge that divided his strip from his neighbor's; a woman was enraged with the lackadaisical habits of a newly acquired daughter-in-law; a man was infuriated with his son for wooing a girl he did not approve of; a girl defied her father in the choice of a husband; a pig or cow strayed into the wrong yard or, worse yet, into the wrong field; a father caught his son or daughter stealing flax or grain—endless were the causes and provocations. Always the quarrels were violent and could be heard all over the village. Women, especially older ones, were as pugnacious as men—and as talented in the art of vituperation. When two men quarreled, often enough they ended in tearing each other's shirts, scratching each other's hands and faces and mauling each other savagely with their fists and feet. An outsider visiting the village might imagine that violence was not only a part of the daily routine of living but a source of diversion and solace.

To me the quarrels of grown folk were wicked affairs. They made me sad and angry and, like my father, I fled from them. Oddly enough I did not mind the quarrels and the scuffles of my playmates, and when drawn into an affray or starting one I was as good as any of them at biting the finger or scratching the face of an antagonist. It was only the battles of grown people that dismayed me.

Our river flowed through a wood, and at the point in the woods where it touched the highway it divided into two arms, which some distance away flowed together again. Over the waters of each arm on the highway hung a small bridge without railings and so loosely put together that, whenever a wagon passed over it, the timbers shook and rattled. Often a timber fell into the water and floated away, and the open space frightened children and horses. Now and then a horse stumbled into it and broke his leg. Every spring or autumn squads of men with axes, saws and chisels spent days repairing the bridges.

One summer a returned soldier, a man who had been in the outside world, had traveled on railroad trains, had seen big cities and had learned something of the ways of superior people, proposed to

a gathering of muzhiks that one arm of the river be filled in with brush and sod, and then they could dispense with one of the bridges. After many tempestuous mass meetings the proposal was agreed upon, and for about a week a crowd of men with teams and shovels were busy hauling sod and brush to the river, filling up one of its arms and building an embankment to the level of the road.

Then winter came. With frost in the ground the embankment held magnificently, and the village was proud of its achievement. But in spring the ice floes ripped the embankment to pieces and swept away all the sod and all the brush. Now the village was worse off than ever. People could not go anywhere, not even to the nearest bazaar. There was nothing to do but to bring back the bridge. Again mass meetings, again acrimony and vituperation, with the men who had opposed its removal visiting all the earthly plagues they could think of on the heads of those who had talked them into it. There was not a man in the village who knew enough engineering to advise the impassioned and floundering muzhiks that, unless buttressed with cement and steel, sod and brush could not possibly hold out against the ice floes and the spring torrents.

There were fish in our river, perch and pike and other kinds. Our peasants loved fish and caught them in hand-woven nets. On emptying the nets they left millions of little fish to die on the banks. No laws protected these fish. In the autumn, for example, after our peasants had pulled and dried their flax they hauled it to the river to soak. If the flax remained in the water long enough it gave off a substance which poisoned the fish. Then the fish would rise to the surface, swim madly about, with their mouths partially perked out of the water, as if in desperate search of an escape from the substance that was killing them. At such times the whole village—men, women, children—turned out with their sacks and homemade baskets to catch fish. Neither lines nor nets were necessary. Children could pick up the swift-gliding and elusive pike with their bare hands. It was a triumph to come home with a basket loaded with fish. We dashed about the river and screamed with joy. Fish, fish, fish! The Lord had never been so kind. We blessed the river, the fish, and of course the Lord. For days we

glutted ourselves with fish, and the poorest families for once had as good meals as koolaks, and it cost nothing, absolutely nothing Afterward, when the orgy of fish-eating was over and people went to the river with nets to get a mess of fish for Friday or Wednesday, the two fast days of the Greek Orthodox religion, they dragged out heaps, not of fish, but of grass and reeds. Then they growled and wailed that the Lord was visiting fresh retribution on the lowly and all-suffering muzhik.

One of our neighbors was a man by the name of Lukyan, a poor man with only one cow and one horse, a bay mare that was getting on in years. Lukyan decided to have her mated, and in due time she bore a sprightly light brown colt with a white patch on its face and white spots on its feet just above the hoofs. Often, in the evening when the horses came back from the communal pasture, I saw this colt gallop gaily about Lukyan's barnyard. Again and again I tried to catch it and play with it, and always it kicked up its heels, turned swiftly about and raced away. Lukyan was pleased with the new addition to his barnyard family. In two years the mare might be too old to work, and he would break in the colt and have a young horse with which to work his five dessiatines (thirteen and a half acres) of land.

When autumn came and there was little grass in the fields, Lukyan began feeding the colt at home. Then horses were no longer driven to pasture and had to be fed at home all winter.

One afternoon I saw Lukyan leading the colt by the halter to the woods.

"What are you going to do with the pretty cold, Lukyan?" I asked.

Glumly he answered:

"I'm going to kill it."

"Lukyan!" I gasped.

"I won't have enough hay and straw for the mare and the cow, and it would die anyway," and he pursued his journey to the woods with the sprightly colt, unused to a halter, whinnying and dancing merrily in the mud.

There were many Lukyans in our village. In autumn a procession

of them led their colts to the woods, killed them there, skinned them and left the carcasses for dogs, wolves and crows to fight over.

Poor as our peasants were, the enormous waste of labor, energy, substance, all a result of inordinate ignorance of the elements of science, only augmented their poverty. Yet nothing caused them so much travail and stamped itself so deeply and so brutally on their very souls as the mud. Here was an enemy that neither tears nor curses nor prayers could move and that no wizard could tame or exorcise.

Late one night, when we were already asleep, there was a loud tapping at our window. Father awoke and inquired who it was. "Quick, Uncle," cried the village shepherd, "your cow is mired, and she'll die if you don't hurry and pull her out." I awoke too and heard the shepherd, and my heart sank. What would we do without our good milch cow? We had sold so many of our cows and horses, we had so little land, and now the black cow, with her fierce horns and abundant milk, was mired in the pasture, bellowing no doubt in her desperate need for help, sinking deeper and deeper in the black muck! I started crying, but Father assured me he would save the cow. It had happened before, he said, and there was no use weeping. Of course it had happened before, and that cow had been swallowed by the mud. Father dressed quickly, woke several neighbors, and, taking ropes with them, they went down to the pasture. In the morning he came back muddy, wet, tired. This time they had saved the cow, and the whole family greeted the announcement with shouts of joy.

Some time later Father and I were returning from the bazaar. It had rained all day, and the roads were rivers of slush. The wheels of our wagon barely rolled along, and Father and I sat in the straw of our willow-woven rack and shivered with cold. In passing a bridge over a pond, the wagon tipped, and we found ourselves sprawling in mud. The horse was down and was so caught in the thills that he could not get up. Father hastened to unhitch him and helped him to his feet. But the wagon we could not lift. Two of the wheels were in the mud and two in the air, and all our efforts to straighten the wagon failed. Soaked with mud, we sat

down and waited for help. Presently two teams drove along, and the men helped us lift the wagon onto the road. Getting stuck or tipping over in the mud was an ordeal which our people faced often enough.

Early one morning Father and I were driving to town. It was after a heavy rain, and as the roads were deep in mud, Father let the horse take his time. Suddenly we heard the sound of bells immediately behind us. In a carriage drawn by four black horses, two abreast, a landlord and his family were driving to town. The road was too narrow for the carriage to pass us, and the liveried coachman shouted to Father to turn quickly aside. But the mud was too deep for our horse to be hurried. Incensed with Father, the coachman in passing lashed away at him several times with his heavy leather whip. Father groaned with pain, and his face streamed with blood. Like evil spirits the mud often brought on us terrors which we never forgot.

A few years ago, while driving with a youthful Soviet school teacher in the province of Ryazan, we plunged into a muddy hollow and had to wait for help to pull us out. "Our fiercest enemies," cried the enraged schoolmaster, "aren't the Whites and the counter-revolutionaries and the bloody capitalists, but our mud. Spies and counter-revolutionaries we can jail and shoot. But what can we do with the mud?" What, indeed, save to fill it with rock and sand and lift the road so high above it that never again can it obtrude its slimy visage before the eye of man?

"And why shouldn't we drink?" I once heard a burly peasant answer a lecturer who urged his audience to a life of temperance. "Suppose you go to the bazaar, and on your way home you get stuck in the mud, and it rains hard, and a raw wind blows over you, and you get cold, and there isn't a soul in sight to help you, and you curse your horse for not being able to pull you out, and you get angry and whip him and threaten to go on whipping him until he drops dead right before your eyes? Ah, citizens, in such a moment a swallow of vodka, a whole bottle of vodka, will work a miracle. On my blessed word it will. It'll make you warm in-

side, steady your hand, calm your heart, and you might even begin to feel sorry for your horse."

Mud! Mud! Mud!

One could write a history of Russia in terms of mud. In time of war it has been her most powerful ally, in time of peace her most formidable enemy. It has won her splendid victories in the battlefield and crushing defeats at the fireside, for while it has swallowed the armed enemy, it has held back the ideas and energies of foreign lands. Home vices have thriven, foreign virtues sunk in it. Who knows what the history of Russia and the world would have been, had one of the czars been able to cover the country with a network of cobbled highways, not only along the military routes, but everywhere, to every village in the land, so that the wisdom, the stimulation, the achievements of the Western world would not have bogged down on the way?

Certainly mud was the despair of our village. In spring and autumn, whenever I peered out of the window of our house, I saw mud everywhere, in strips, in rolls, in shimmering billows. Right outside our house on the main highway was a mud pond. Peasants stopped their horses for rest before venturing across, and often as they started they kept up a barrage of blows with the whip to prevent the animals from stalling before they reached the other side. Pigs wallowed in it, geese and ducks swam in its water holes, hens shunned it. Once I lost my shoes in it, and Mother had to wade knee deep in her boots to pick them up. She threatened to whip me if I ever tried again to wade across its oozy expanse in my shoes.

For weeks at a time there was hardly a dry spot in the village except at the upper end where the fields began, and unless we stayed in the house we had to wade in mud. It began at our very doors. Sometimes it was as deep there as in any mud pond, and the foot slipped deep into muck the moment it dropped over the doorstep. The most industrious women gave up trying to keep their houses clean. It was no use. Even if we tried, which we seldom did, to wipe the mud off our feet or our boots with a broom, we could not do it. It stuck to us with incredible tenaciousness. We could only wash it off in the water trough. People never ventured

outdoors in their boots—unless, like my mother, they could not walk barefooted. If they did wear boots outdoors, they had to wash and wipe them and pour grease over the leather to prevent it from shrinking and cracking. When our people went to church on Sundays and holidays they carried their boots on a stick over their shoulders and walked barefooted all the way. On reaching the churchyard they wiped their feet and legs on the grass and put on their boots. When church services were over and they started for home they pulled off their boots, slung them over their shoulders again, rolled up their trousers or dresses to their knees and walked home barefooted.

We got so used to the mud that we stopped cursing it, unless it caused some immediate mishap. We took it as an inevitable part of our daily struggle. Sometimes we even got fun out of it. If, when we peered out of a window, we saw a man or a woman who was carrying a calf on his or her back slip and fall in it, we burst into a laugh. Some of us were so good-humored that we didn't mind laughing at ourselves when we fell into its black slime. Sometimes boys would search out a particularly thick mud hole and spread themselves out on their backs with their arms outstretched, for the pleasure of seeing the neatly wrought impressions of themselves when they got up, as other children do in snow.

We were born to the mud, and we suffered it all our lives. When very young we might even whip adventure out of it in one way or another. Sometimes it was the last thing our people saw when they shut their eyes forever.

On my return to America from one of my frequent visits to Russia some time ago, in speaking of our old home which I had revisited, Mother said:

"Does the street still get muddy after a rain?"

"Yes, it does, as badly as in the old days."

"And the mud pond in front of our house, is it still there?"

"Yes, it is, and it still takes a good horse to pull a wagon after a rain"

She nodded and said:

"Oh, that mud, that horrible mud! Maybe they have sidewalks now?"

"No, they haven't. They're only talking about it."

Again she said:

"Oh, that mud, that horrible mud!"

"Yes, it is horrible."

"And do the muzhiks still wear *lapti* [bark sandals]?"

"Not as much as they used to."

"That's good. It is easier to get about in mud with boots on. I always wore your father's, do you remember?"

"The young people all have boots now."

"Really?"

"Wouldn't you like to go back and look at the old place?"

She shuddered as she answered quickly:

"Never, not for one second! I'd die if I went back."

"Don't you even want to go and look at it and then come back here?"

"Not even to look at it, never!"

"Why do you hate the place so?"

"Why shouldn't I? Think of the difference here—this morning, when I got up and looked out of the window, I saw two men washing and scrubbing the street in front of our house, and it was so nice and cheering to watch them; and there,"—again she shivered—"mud and mud, eternal, horrible mud! I can't imagine why you like to go back so often."

I can easily understand Mother's feeling of horror at the remembrance of the mud in the old village. She had faced it for many years, had trudged through it in Father's big boots with heavy sacks on her back, day after day. When she thinks of the place the first image that leaps to her mind is the mud, which to her has become a symbol of all the misery and desolation she had endured there. To no small degree the sordidness of the Russian village—the gruffness of the muzhik, his explosive temper, his addiction to liquor, his cruelty to animals, and often to his wife and children—has been a consequence of his incessant fight with mud. Once one has lived in it and with it one remembers it forever—perhaps as my mother does, with disgust and horror; perhaps as I do, sometimes with amusement and sometimes with sheer wonder that we ever survived!

## CHAPTER IV

## *Adventure*

"WHY," WROTE SALTYKOV SHTSHEDRIN, one of Russia's most gifted satirists, "does our peasant go in bast slippers instead of leather boots? Why does such dense and widespread ignorance prevail in our land? How does it happen that one rarely meets a peasant who knows what a bed is? Why do we perceive in all the movements of the peasant a vein of fatalism devoid of the impress of conscience? Why in a word do the peasants come into the world like insects and die like summer flies?"

Saltykov Shtshedrin was not alone in his outburst of wrath and despair over the Russian village. To many a writer it had always seemed a place of unmitigated horror. Reshetnikov, Pisemsky, Tolstoy, above all Chekhov and Ivan Bunin have wept over it and cursed its idiocy, its barbarism, its appalling backwardness. There are no more biting and heartbreaking narratives in the whole of Russian literature than Bunin's *The Village,* and Chekhov's *The Peasants.* Indeed to Russian men and women with a glimmer of social consciousness, or to the progressive-minded intelligentsia, the village has always been a source of unending despair. The penitent nobleman, a tragic and noble figure in old Russia and in the old Russian literature, was eating his heart out with remorse because of the wrongs that his class had for ages been heaping on the lowly and enduring muzhik.

Yet to me our old home never was the nightmare that distinguished writers had beheld in the old Russian village. Not that I was always supremely happy and had accepted without a murmur the condition of life to which I had to submit. The mud was sickening, the dogs were a nuisance and a menace, the annual killing of colts was heartbreaking, the poverty was a continual torment. There was nothing in the world I so much envied the children of our nearest landlord, whenever in passing I saw them dashing joyfully about with spirited dogs in their wooded and sheltered yard, as the privilege which I knew they enjoyed of always having butter

on their bread. If only we always had butter! If only Mother would not take to town every roll she churned to sell in the bazaar! Of course she had to. Now in anger, now in remorse, she would explain that she could not help herself, because creditors never ceased to harass her and she must buy kerosene and needles and thread and soap and now and then a piece of cashmere or calico for a dress for herself or the children.

In those days to have butter seemed the height of luxurious living. Now and then, when Mother was out of the house, I would sneak into the cupboard, cleave off a slice of the precious food and make a dash for the woods. There I would find a sheltered place in the bushes, lie down on the grass and make a feast of the stolen butter and a lump of black bread.

Yet there was fun and fellowship in the village, and adventure and romance. Had I remained there to maturity I might have felt different. The mud alone might have seeped itself into my blood as it had into my mother's and forever seared my mind against bright remembrance. But I was scarcely fourteen when we migrated to America, and youth, with its irrepressible energies and its incessant search for change and action, unless actually starving, never fails to whip pleasure and excitement out of its surroundings, no matter how dismal, and always loves to invest its own little world with enchantment and heroism. I certainly did so, and so did the other children in the village. Not a day but we had our fill of excitement. We ran races and wrestled. We made horns and whistles out of the bark of willow limbs and played tunes on them. We played ball games. We played other games too complicated to describe. We picked berries and mushrooms, and we raced each other to see who would be the first to fill a basket. We raided orchards and gardens. We gathered daisies and cornflowers and wove them into wreaths and gave them to our sisters or wore them on our own heads. We went rowing, and when we tipped over we shouted with glee as we swam and scrambled to shore and dried our clothes in the sun. With hand-made lines and hooks we fished. In spring we scampered about the birchwood and watched our fathers and brothers draw sap, and when they were not looking we dipped our chins and mouths into the little wooden troughs and swallowed, as fast as we could, gulp after gulp of the sweet liquid.

In summer the wood and the river were our chief lure. We went there as often as we could. We gathered brush and built fires in holes in the ground and roasted potatoes in the hot ashes. We climbed trees and searched for birds' nests, and when we came on a crow's nest we tore it to pieces, and the fledglings we flung with savage pleasure to the ground. Crows pulled seeds out of our fields and shelled our rye and barley and deserved no mercy. Of course we went swimming, and what a triumph it was for anyone to venture across the "devil's hole," which was especially deep, indeed the deepest spot in the river, in defiance of the water nymphs and the other beings that inhabited its depths! We told each other blood-curdling tales of the punishment they inflicted on those whom they dragged down to their diabolic abodes, and there was no telling when any of them would surge upward, seize a swimmer by the loins and dive down with him into the watery deep. Of course if one kept a cross on his neck, or recited a prayer while swimming across the hole, he was protected from this doom. But if a pretty nymph bobbed up and nobody saw her except the swimmer, to whom alone she was visible, and with her glowing eyes, her captivating smile, her shimmering black hair, she mesmerized him into flinging off his cross, because that's what she wanted him to do, or into forgetting his prayers, until he could only gaze at her and only her, as though he had no longer the power to see anything else? Then, little brother or little sister, the Lord Himself could not rescue you from doom!

Once a young man on horseback tried to swim across the "devil's hole." He and the horse sank when they got to the middle. The whole village turned out to see if they could rescue him. In vain. Nobody could rescue a human soul once it fell into the clutches of the spirits on the bottom. For a long time afterwards we took no chances in swimming across the "plagued hole." We avoided deep water everywhere.

Much as we liked the wood and the river, we never failed to return home by sunset about the time the cows, sheep, colts and pigs were coming back from pasture. We had to help our mothers and sisters head them off if they sought to pass by our gateways. Cows were easy to handle, sheep even more so, and of course there is no adventure in anything that is easy of achievement. Colts often pro-

vided a chance for a lively chase. But no animals stirred our fighting blood like the pigs. Of the razor-back variety, they could hold their own in a tussle with a colt or a dog. To the children they offered an opportunity not only for battle but for profit. With all our might we flung ourselves on them and pulled at the bristles on their backs. They galloped and squealed and tossed us to the ground, but we clung to them with desperation until some of the bristles loosened from their hides.

Sometimes our mothers took the part of the pigs and cuffed our ears when they caught us chasing after them and pulling their bristles. My mother always objected to my participation in this barbaric pastime, and for quite dignified reasons. As the son of a Jew I had no business messing with pigs. Besides, someday I might be a learned man, and it was not fitting for a boy destined for such distinction to chase after pigs and pluck bristles out of their backs.

Blithely I ignored Mother's objections. If other children enjoyed it, I would not be deprived of the privilege of joining them, and if it was unbecoming to a boy who might someday be a learned man, then to the devil with learning! The fun and bristles were more precious than all the learning in the world. Did not King, the Jewish peddler, gather the bristles for America? If you gave King a handful he loaded your hands with gingersnaps, and that was more than our objecting mothers ever did for us. Often, of course, we wondered what on earth America did with all the bristles we sent her from our village. We asked King, but he knew no more than we did. Nor did he care. All he wanted was bristles, and he encouraged us to pull all we could from every pig that crossed our path.

The sheer primitiveness of our village afforded no small amount of diversion. There were the beggars, for example, Jewish and non-Jewish, mostly non-Jewish The Jewish beggars were always men in apparently good health, for they made the rounds of villages on foot, and they traveled alone. The non-Jewish beggars always suffered from visible physical mutilation—blindness in one or both eyes, an arm or a leg, both arms or both legs cut off, the stumps clasped tightly in specially carved blocks of wood, and they never traveled alone. Sometimes they wandered with their families with

a horse and wagon, and sometimes a man had only his wife or a child as companion.

A Jewish beggar always entered the house and sat around until he was fed and given a few kopecks. The non-Jewish beggar never walked inside a house. With his ancient lyre strung over his back, he wandered from yard to yard with wife or child and while he strummed they chanted an old ballad, and then the lady of the house would come out with a piece of bread, a slice of an egg, a cold griddle cake as a reward for the singing. Again and again in company of other children I followed such beggars from house to house and listened enraptured to their wailing melodies.

Beggars were as accomplished storytellers as they were ballad singers. Wandering from village to village and visiting bazaars and inns, they gathered the news of the world, and when evening came and the day's labors were over, the house in which they stopped for the night was crowded with people in search of enlightenment. Would the Czar our Little Father start another war with the pagan Turk or the no less pagan Japanese? Would the governor of the province stop officials from flaying the hide off muzhiks with the fines and bribes they were extorting? Would landlords lower their rentals on land or the purchase price of land, and would they allow muzhiks to gather firewood in their forests—fallen limbs and trees—at five kopecks a load? Was there danger of the Antichrist swooping on them, and where had the satanic villain been seen last and what special depredations had he been perpetrating? Would the archbishop fulfill his long-made promise and come through the village and heal the sick and the crippled, and above all shrive away the evil spirits that had been secretly poisoning pigs and calves and sheep and causing them to die young? Endless were the questions that our peasants flung at beggars, and never had I heard of a beggar who stalled for an answer. They were not learned men. They could rarely read and write. But they were wanderers, men of God, with special gifts of divination and prophecy, and were more exciting to listen to than Blind Sergey or any other "learned" man in the village. When they ran out of news or stories of bandits who killed rich merchants in the deep forests of the north, and of evil spirits that had sought to traduce them, they would pick up their lyres and strum away and sing favorite

ballads. No wonder people thought it an honor to entertain beggars.

Our peasants were amazingly gregarious. On the least pretext they left their work and went to a gathering. The blacksmith shop, the street, our house, the windmill, the fields, a yard with a pile of timber on which people could sit, were the usual places of assemblage. All the affairs of the community, including the election of local officials, were transacted there. Then there were the weddings. Doors were open to all comers for food, drink, song, dance and merry, boisterous talk. At christenings likewise neighbors might drop in for a tumbler of mead or vodka and for a spoonful of cabbage soup with chunks of fat pork. Funerals were occasions of loud wailing until after the burial. On the return of the mourners from the cemetery there was a feast in commemoration of the good deeds and the good life of the deceased. Sometimes, shortly before he breathed his last, a man might instruct his wife which sheep or hens to kill for the feast.

Young people had their occasions of merriment. On Sundays and holidays they gathered in the street or in some house for a dance. In rainy weather boys and girls without boots got their feet soaked with mud. They danced just the same. There was no discrimination. A girl with a sparkle in her eyes, a flush in her red cheeks, a long braid of velvety hair plaited with gay ribbons floating on her back, never needed to worry about partners, even if her feet were black with mud; neither did a barefoot boy with upstanding wavy hair, a warm laugh, a mellow tenor or a robust baritone voice. All afternoon and evening the village resounded with the wails of the accordion or violin, the stamp of dancing feet and the chatter and laughter of the dancers.

In late autumn girls gathered in the smoke shed in the woods to husk flax. They worked from early morning until late in the evening, and it was exciting to peep in on them and hear them talk and sing and watch them lift and lower the wooden lever into the wooden dropper and break up the husks and shake them off the flax. Now and then one of them asked you to do an errand for her—fetch wood, water, or stir the fire in the hearth. When darkness came and you were in an especially mischievous mood

you hid somewhere in the thatch roof and booed and howled and wailed and sought to make the girls believe that you were the Evil One. But woe if they found you in the thatch or in some other way discovered it was you who frightened them! They did not beat you as a man would have done. They rolled you over the ground, put sand, dirt, dead leaves into your clothes and scolded you roundly. Of course you could fight back, and if you caught a girl by her tumbling braid of hair and stuck your teeth into it or pulled it with your hands she might scream for mercy. Sometimes she felt so repentant that she helped you clean the sand and dirt and dead leaves out of your clothes.

In winter girls gathered in groups to spin flax, and in the evenings the boys invariably joined them. When the boys came the spinning might as well be forgotten.

Children were not welcomed to these gatherings, and if they sneaked in or squeezed in, often enough a grown boy—never a girl—would seize them by the hair, lift them outdoors and tell them to go home and watch mamma do her cooking. Yet I often went to these socials. If I stayed in a corner and contented myself with watching the crowd make merry, I might be rewarded with a slice of bread, a pickle, a piece of herring or, what was far more precious, a handful of pumpkin seeds. I never sat at a spinning social, but I wished with all my heart that I was grown up. It was such fun to be grown up. You were master of your desires. You not only had the right to choose the girl you liked, be with her all the time, dance with her, embrace her, kiss her on the cheeks, twine her braid round your hand, tickle her under the arms until she rolled with laughter, you might even put your hand inside her warm bosom and hold it there.

Nothing so deeply stirred my desire to be grown up as *nochleg*. Literally, the word means night shelter, but in our village it meant the act of riding the family horse to the communal pasture for the night. Nobody ever rode there alone. Always the riders gathered in the center of the village, outside of our house. Never in a hurry, they always waited for late comers. Nor did they sit idly on their horses. They always sang. A soloist would start a verse, and others would join in the chorus. Ballads, ditties, pastorals poured out of them with a magic fluency. No matter how hard they worked

during the day, when they were on the backs of their horses on the way to *nochleg* they were as fresh as the descending dew. Their voices were clear and tireless and rang with a fervor that stirred and haunted.

At times Mother expressed the wish that the songfest might take place at some other part of the village, so that she wouldn't be kept awake. Yet I was glad that her wish remained unfulfilled. Our house, our neighbors' houses, the very dust or mud in the street gained brightness and dignity from these songfests. Carried away by envy and rapture, I longed for the day when I too might be old enough to join in the adventure of *nochleg*. At no other time did the village seem more cheering and more noble. If the moon was out and silvered the fields, the wood, the river, the windmill, the whole world seemed to be drenched in eternal magic.

## CHAPTER V

## *The Evil One*

In ordinary life Hrupina was a shrunken woman with a freckled face, protruding teeth and a pendulous lower lip. Always in poor health, she never failed to announce to anyone she met that soon, very soon, she would die and that she did not want to die. The worst life, she wailed, was better than the best death. She loved children and often gave them pears and apples out of her orchard. I never refused her gifts, and as far as I know no boys ever did, though girls sometimes had to be persuaded to accept them. And why? Because Hrupina was a witch. Nights she was no Hrupina at all. She transformed herself into a cat and went around to neighbors' houses and lapped up their milk and messed up their cheese. You might think that by staying up all night and watching the cupboard you could intercept the cat and slap it hard with your hands or whip it with a rod and cause it to take flight and never again to invade your cupboard or your house. But Hrupina was not that kind of cat. She could make herself as invisible as the air and lap up your milk in your very presence without your being aware of her intrusion.

Hrupina wept angry tears when anyone reminded her of her misdeeds in her transformed existence. But what else could she do? No witch would admit that she was a witch.

Ulyana was another witch. She lived in the little village across our river. Fat and flabby, with a double chin and glassy eyes, she always looked cross and shook with palsy and seldom spoke to anybody. She never visited neighbors, never even ventured beyond her gateway. If you were brave enough to peer into her window after dark, you might see little lights wandering all over the room. So much of a witch was Ulyana that her own son would not tolerate her in his house and moved her to a place all by herself across the street. In passing her house, children looked up apprehensively and were ready any instant to break into a run.

"Why," one of my playmates once told a group of us as we gathered around an open fire on the bank of the river, "she never has a lamp or a faggot lighted in her house, and yet if you look into it after dark it is always lighted up, and you see little fires moving up and down the walls, the floor, the ceiling, the oven, everywhere, and every one of those little fires is a spirit. Not a night, little brothers, but they gather round her and she has a big stick that has magic in it, and with it she can do anything she wants with any spirit. Yes, she can; my grandfather says so. Once, early in the evening, he went to see her. He found her alone in the house, sitting as always on her sleeping place by the oven and mumbling witch words to herself. Would you believe it, little brothers, before Grandfather walked into the house he heard a lot of noises, and the moment he was inside not a sound did he hear! He asked her if he could pasture his cow along the edge of her road, and she never answered, not a word. It was as though she wasn't in the house at all. Grandfather got so angry that he swore and spat at her, and as he walked out of the door he heard loud laughter, as though a crowd of people was there, though he hadn't seen a single human being anywhere in the house. 'Lord have mercy,' he prayed and ran out of the cursed house and cursed yard."

Once in summer I walked by Ulyana's house and braved myself to lean on her gate, which as always was shut. I searched the win-

dow with my eyes for a glimpse of the little lights and fires I had heard so much about, but saw in the unwashed panes nothing more than the reflection of the sun. I started climbing the gate with the intention of going up to one of the windows and pressing my face against it so that I could see the inside of her room, but I slipped to the ground and dared not make another effort. No doubt the gate, like everything else about the woman's premises, was bewitched. Still I lingered around, and then the door opened and Ulyana came out. The sun was hot, but she wore a heavy shawl on her head, and in her shaky hands she held her famous long knotty staff. "Good day, Ulyana," I shouted.

Slowly she turned her head and glared at me. I could see her lips moving as people said they always did. Was she pronouncing a curse on me? Frightened, I took to my heels.

Amelko the Screamer was one of our neighbors. Bald-headed and red-faced, he loved to talk, and his explosive laugh always rose high and loud above the voice of any assemblage. Amelko had had his doubts about the Evil One. He had never seen him, nor felt his presence anywhere in his house, his barns, his fields. Then something happened, and his doubts dissolved into the air like the smoke that rolled out of his black round chimney.

"Once, just before retiring, brothers," he began his story, "I walked out of the house, and of a sudden I heard a galloping in my horse stable, a wild galloping. 'Strange,' I said to myself, 'that my young colt should be galloping so late in the night, and in the stable of all places.' I went to see what had happened, and the moment I opened the door the galloping stopped. I groped my way to the colt and, sure enough, he was panting hard, and there was sweat under his mane. 'What in thunder,' I said to myself, 'has happened?' I searched the stable up and down. I yelled and yelled. I swore and swore. Nobody answered. Not a sound of anything or anyone anywhere. So I thought that a rat or some other animal had scared the beast. He's always been high-spirited, you know.

"I left the stable, and when I reached the house the galloping started once more. I hurried back to the barn, and no sooner did I walk inside than it stopped again. I yelled and yelled at the top of my voice, hoping someone would make an answer. But not a

sound came to my ears, nothing but the loud breathing of the horse. I wondered who the enemy might be. I tell you, brothers, I was worried. I lingered in the stable a long time and listened. Not a stir anywhere. I then thought of hiding somewhere for the night, and finally decided it was no use. No living thing could possibly be in the barn. 'The horse,' I said to myself, 'is a high-strung creature, and he must have been imagining things.' Sometimes horses are like that, you know, just like us humans. So I patted him again and spoke to him and tickled him over the brow and said 'good night' and left.

"Once outside, I paused and listened. No noises, no galloping. 'Sure,' I said to myself, 'the creature must have been imagining things,' and so I started for the house, and of a sudden—tramp tramp, tramp tramp—the horse was galloping again. I got so furious that I rushed into the house, lighted the lantern, seized my axe and ran back to the stable, ready to knock on the head and kill—on my word I was!—the creature, even if it was a man that made such wicked sport of my horse and of me. Yet—would you believe it, brothers?—the moment I swung the door open the galloping stopped. I searched and searched the barn, the floor, the walls, the roof, and not a trace of a human being or any living thing did I find anywhere.

"I searched and searched the stable until sweat poured down my face, and then I had to admit to myself that it was the Evil One who was playing a mean and brutal prank on my colt. I wouldn't have cared so much if he'd just had a ride and quit. But the blasted idiot was trying to ruin my colt, ride it to death. There was only one thing to do—exorcise the Evil One not only from the stable but from anywhere else on my premises. So I went to Zakhar the Magician, and he came and pronounced a curse on the scoundrel and left a network of enchanted twigs over the door, and since then I have heard not a sound out of him."

Stories of the Evil One riding horses at night in the stable were among the most common and most exciting that I heard. Amelko never tired of repeating his story, as though it were the most momentous experience, indeed the great drama and great triumph, of his life.

My own father loved to tell the story of his experience with the

Evil One. One night he was coming home from town. It was dark, and he was sleepy, and knowing he could trust his horse he dropped the lines and lay down in the straw. Suddenly the horse stopped, and he awoke and looked around. Immediately in front of the horse, stretched across the road lay a sheep with its feet fettered as though someone who had been taking it to the bazaar had lost it on the way. Stepping out of the wagon, he went over to pick it up and take it home. Scarcely had he stooped when it uttered a loud human laugh and vanished.

"What would you do," I once said to my chum Sergey, "if you ever walked by the stable and heard the Evil One riding your horse?"

"I'd go in and kill him," he answered with bravado.

"How would you kill him?"

"I'd throw stones at him."

"But you couldn't see him—how then could you throw stones at him?"

"I'd go round and round and search for a warm breath, and the moment I found it I'd throw at it lots and lots of stones."

"But suppose the Evil One ran away?"

"Of course he'd run away, but I'd throw so many stones I'd hit him anyway."

"And how could you tell that you hit him?"

"I'd pick up the stones I had thrown, and those that had blood on them would be the ones that had hit him."

The Evil One was as real to us as the thatch roofs and the mud and infinitely more exciting. We saw him, heard him, battled with him. He blew out our lights, ate up our food, laughed at us, made fools of us, sought to kill our livestock and ensnare us into mischief and ruin. Mystery and hazard, adventure and drama, he was to us an embodiment of the forces of evil in perpetual clash with the forces of good, inside and outside of our lives. Stories of his escapades took the place of books and the theater and the intellectual satisfactions that a civilized community affords its people, with the difference, of course, that they were more real to us than were the events in fictional compositions to their readers. To me

the stories of the Evil One were not only a source of boundless excitement but a guide and a revelation of man's insecurities and triumphs.

For sheer picturesqueness and variety of experience with the Evil One, nobody in the village could rival Blind Sergey, so called because one of his eyes was sightless, with the lids as if glued together. The outstanding "scholar," in the village, there was not a document anyone ever received, whether from the government or from a private institution, that he could not read and interpret to the least detail. Uncommonly gifted, with a flair for the melodramatic phrase, he made an ideal letter writer, and fathers who had sons in the army and girls whose sweethearts spent the winters in lumber camps went to him to have letters read and written. Having studied a geography book, he could discuss islands, oceans, mountains with a familiarity which made people think that he was talking of things which he had not only seen with his one sharp eye but which he had fashioned with his sturdy hands. Few beggars were as good storytellers as he, and he never tired of narrating the tale of the Russian beggar who had tricked a horse out of Napoleon and left him stranded in a forest, and of Field Marshal Kutuzov who had lured the French emperor into the Russian mud and left him there to fight his way back to dry land and home.

Gifted with a mellow tenor voice, Blind Sergey loved singing as much as storytelling, and no one in the whole countryside knew by heart as many songs as he. Often in winter he organized choirs of boys and girls, and the whole village turned out to hear the concerts they gave of sacred and secular songs.

As sociable a man as he naturally enough attended many public functions and imbibed his share of vodka, which was as much a part of these functions as the talk, the songs, often enough the quarrels. Yet he seldom drank to a point of inebriety. Nobody loathed the very word *pyanitsa* (drunkard) more than he. All the more surprising was the wager he once made that he could gulp down in one effort a whole quart of vodka, red-labeled, the strong variety. A neighbor of his was willing to pay him five roubles in gold if he achieved the feat and to collect as much

from him if he failed. The wager took place in our house in the presence of a crowd of spectators. Tipping the bottle into his mouth, he held it there until he had drained it to the last drop. Then he collapsed, and people thought he was dead. Quickly they carried him outdoors and rubbed him vigorously with snow. He was in bed for two weeks, but he had won the wager, and his prestige rose enormously.

Blind Sergey not only believed in the Evil One, but he had had exciting encounters with him.

"I'll never forget the time," he once told us, "when I was late in cutting my hay in the swamp beyond the village of Dorosin. It was a wet season, and I had to take off my trousers and wade knee deep in water. Up on a hillside I built a little straw tent and kept my food there and my tools and my woolen *svitka* and everything else. Well, brothers, I mowed and mowed all day, and when dusk came I was still mowing. I had just another couple of swaths to cut, and I thought I'd go on working until I finished it all. Soon the moon came out, and I was glad, because it was more cheerful to work by moonlight than by dark. I felt happy, I tell you, at the very thought that I'd have my meadow mowed, and the next day I'd rake out all the hay on dry land and, with the sun as hot as it was, it would take no time for it to dry, and then I would stack it and go home. . . . I worked and worked, and at last I swung my scythe over the last swath of grass. Thirsty, hungry, happy, I went back to my straw hut. I thought I'd build a little fire and boil potatoes and sup well on potatoes, bread and cucumbers, and then I'd lie down and have the sleep of my life. . . . Imagine therefore my surprise, brothers, when on returning to the hut I found my food gone, my *svitka* gone, my trousers gone! Everything was gone. Who could have taken it? Surely none of the other muzhiks who were cutting hay, because they were so far away, and I had not seen a soul all day long. . . . I racked my mind, and then I thought, well, perhaps a wolf had gotten inside. But what would a wolf want with my *svitka* and my trousers? I went out and started a search. I walked and walked, and then of a sudden, 'way out in the landlord's swamp where the grass had not yet been cut, I saw a man in gray—yes, gray. I shouted to him. He didn't answer. I shouted again, and again no answer. I started toward him, and

as I advanced he retreated. I stopped and he stopped, I advanced again and he too advanced. I knew now that I was face to face with the Evil One. He was drawing me farther and farther into the swamp. I was already waist deep in water, and if I walked on I might have gotten deeper yet and he might have tricked me into taking off my cross, and then, brothers, he could have ensnared my soul—and there would have been no Blind Sergey, no man of God, no Christian with a soul worthy of the mercy of our Lord, and so I shouted: 'Evil One, you cursed spirit, you foul piece of carrion, you stinking scoundrel, away from here, to your den of sin and ugliness, away, I tell you, or I'll pronounce a curse on you.' And then I heard a laugh—yes, a laugh, and not a human laugh, either, and again I said, 'Evil One, away, I tell you, or the good Lord will smite you down and you'll never rise up again.' And again I heard a laugh, and then suddenly he vanished, floated up in the air and vanished as though he had melted away. I went back to my tent, and what d'you suppose? The *svitka* was there, the sack of potatoes was there, the pig-iron pot was there, the bread was there, the cucumbers were there, everything was back and in the very place in which I had left it—yes, everything, brothers! So I built my fire and cooked my potatoes and had my supper and then lay down and sang a little and slept the best sleep of my life."

Nor was it only older people who were engrossed in thoughts and stories of the Evil One. Young people found the subject equally exciting, though they had fewer personal experiences to record. The story of Semko the Little Accordionist, though told and retold with mounting detail and fervor, never failed to stir terror, especially in the girls. Semko was a handsome and garrulous lad in a neighboring village. He would dare anything on a wager, and one evening at a spinning social he wagered another youth that in spite of the blizzard he wouldn't be afraid to visit the cemetery, which was about a verst outside of the village. He would go there and come back and nothing would happen to him—not a rip in his clothes, unless he fell over a fence post, and not a scratch on his face. He would bring back a token from the little chapel to prove his presence in the cemetery. Friends cautioned him not to

defy evil spirits too flagantly on so stormy a night with the wind "eating away mouthfuls of thatch" from every roof and blowing sheaves and sheaves of snow in all directions. Semko laughed good-humoredly at all warnings. Singing merrily, he departed and promised to be back before any girl could wind a spindleful of yarn. A long time passed, and he didn't return. His friends were worried and wondered whether this time Semko had not become the victim of his own bravery. The whole night passed, and Semko didn't return. The next morning he was found dead in a snow-bank at the gateway of the cemetery. Of course an evil spirit had choked all life out of him.

Next to Blind Sergey no one could tell as exciting stories of the Evil One as old Ahay. One of the best friends of our family, he visited us often, cut wood for us, built a fire for Mother on the Sabbath, helped us with the haying and the harvesting. He was almost a member of our family. It was from Ahay that I learned a lot about the ways of wolves. Wolves, he assured me, were cunning beasts, more cunning than foxes in spite of what people said about them. "Think of it," he once said to me, "a wolf always tries to get hold of a horse by the throat, because that is the easiest way to kill a horse. Of course a young horse won't let a wolf get near—will kick the guts out of him. That's why a wolf won't attack a young horse unless it is just a slip of a colt. A wolf always tries to attack an older horse, and d'you know, little son, even a horse has wisdom—lots and lots of wisdom—and when he sees a wolf, he'll keep his head down, his teeth in the grass, so that the wolf cannot get at his throat. But some wolves—yes, there are such, I tell you—will gather dirt in their paws and throw it into the eyes of the old horse, and then it's good-by horse, for when he lifts his head to shake the dirt out of his eyes the wolf seizes him by the throat." Ahay also knew clever ways of fooling a wolf so he couldn't do you any harm. "Just lie down on the ground and don't breathe. He'll come over, sniff of you, and if he thinks you're dead, he'll walk off and not touch a hair of your head."

"Have you ever done it, Ahay?" I once asked him.

"Of course I have, many times."

"And nothing ever happened to you?"

"Don't you see for yourself?"

The gleam of earnestness in his blue eyes removed all doubt from my young mind of the veracity of his words.

Ahay knew not only the ways of wolves but also of *rusalkas*—water nymphs. Whenever a girl was drowned she turned into a *rusalka* and wandered all over the countryside. You could see her everywhere, on top of trees, on fences, on the bank of the river, and most of all in grain fields.

"Never go alone to pick cornflowers in the rye fields, little son," Ahay cautioned me. "A *rusalka* loves to hide in the tall rye so she won't be seen, and when you're alone there's no telling what she'll do."

"You've seen *rusalkas,* Ahay?"

"Lots of them."

"What do they look like?" I had heard from others what *rusalkas* looked like, but since Ahay had seen so many of them I wanted to hear him describe them.

"They're very beautiful. They are short, with long black hair, which they wear loose on their backs, and they have large, shiny black eyes and beautiful breasts And they're very lonely. They'd like to come back to their old life and their old friends, but they cannot, because they were drowned, and when they get too lonely they want to ensnare somebody, especially children. It's dangerous, son, to look into a *rusalka's* eyes. She fixes you with them so you can't run away from her, and then she comes over and tickles and tickles you until you laugh yourself to death."

"But supposing you aren't ticklish?" asked I.

"She'll kill you anyway."

Once Ahay told me the saddest story I had ever heard about a *rusalka:*

"When I was a child I knew a girl, a very pretty girl, who was in love with a boy, whom her parents didn't like. He was handsome and cheerful but poor, his father had only one dessiatine (2.7 acres) of land and no horse and only one scrawny cow. The girl's father wanted her to marry a man with many dessiatines, many horses, many cows. The girl wept and pleaded with her father to allow her to marry the boy she loved. But the father was as stubborn as your father's old horse Kashtan, and he wouldn't let the girl marry

the man she loved. Heartbroken, she threw herself into the river and drowned. Then she became a *rusalka*. Neighbors saw her on fences, in rye fields, on the bank of a river, and she had not changed much except that her hair was black and her eyes had become large and gleamed like flames. People even spoke to her, but she never answered. A young *rusalka*, she was still unused to the ways of her kind and was easily frightened, and sometimes she ran away and disappeared.

"Then, one evening, the boy she loved saw her sitting on a fence. He spoke to her, and she made no answer. He drew close, and still she was silent. Again and again he spoke to her, and then she flew up into the air and disappeared. The boy watched and watched and called and called, and then he saw her again some distance away, standing in a meadow. He hurried over there, and when he got close and spoke to her she once more disappeared, only to reappear still farther away on the edge of the wood. Again he spoke to her, told her he still loved her and asked her to try and come back to him, because he couldn't live without her. Not a word did she answer, but he wouldn't leave her and said so, even if she was a *rusalka*. The next morning he was found dead under a tree in the wood. After that the *rusalka* was seen no more."

I am no anthropologist, and I know neither the origin nor much of the significance of these stories of the Evil One and of the *rusalkas*. Yet hearing them in my boyhood days was a memorable experience. They endowed the world around me with a meaning and an excitement that often took my breath away. It vested our very mud with drama, for battles with the Evil One were often fought and won in the mud. What if there was no butter in the house, and the shoes soaked up muck and water, and the feet were wet and cold? There were worse things than these in life, and one had only to pay a visit to Blind Sergey and old Ahay and hear their stories of the Evil One and the *rusalkas* to become shiveringly aware of it. They were God's curse and man's greatest enemy, greater than the mud, the cold, the poverty. As long as man knew how to defend himself against their wiles and depredations, he could laugh with joy and be grateful for everything he had. Man was stronger and more heroic than all the evil spirits in the world.

## CHAPTER VI

## *Girls*

ONCE A YOUNG MAN by the name of Nazarya on his return home from long service in the czarist navy brought his wife an unheard-of gift—a piece of scented soap. His wife smelled of it and flushed with ecstasy; his father and mother smelled of it and smacked their lips with pleasure; his brothers and sisters smelled of it with joy; neighbors, on coming to welcome the returned sailor, smelled of it and wagged their heads in wonder; and girls who flocked to listen to news of the outside world held it long and tenderly in their hands and dreamed of the day when some obliging youth would favor them with as precious a gift.

That was how scented soap came to our village, and our girls welcomed its advent with hearts of hope and joy. And no wonder. Within the confines of our primitive society, cosmetics were as unusual as city fashion in dress. Lipstick, rouge, talcum powder, perfumes were utterly unknown. Yet our girls, like those in any other land, eagerly reached out for novelties that promised to enhance their attractiveness. The money their fathers permitted them to keep out of their earnings as day laborers on near-by landlords' estates went for shiny cheap rings, gay colored beads, gaudy ribbons for their hair, flashy kerchiefs for their heads and brilliant dyes for the homespun yarns that they wove into the cloth of which they made their clothes. Untouched by city styles, they had not yet discovered the blouse and the one-piece dress. The low-necked sleeveless jacket reaching to the hips, which they called a corset, worn over a white linen shirt with flapping collar and long sleeves, and an amply pleated skirt short enough to escape the mud were the unchanging fashion of the times. Talented with the needle, they embroidered the sleeves and collar of the linen shirt, the front of the corset and the edge of the skirt with bright designs of cherry blossoms, daisies, cornflowers, or poppies in bloom. On Sundays, seen in the distance on their way to church with the sun upon them, the multicolored ribbons in their swinging braids gleamed

like moving rainbows. No other people in the village loved Sundays and holidays more than girls, for even when they had no leather shoes and went about barefooted or in the execrable *lapti*—bast sandals—they glowed with pride in the gaiety of their holiday attire, which, with the white bark of the birch and the green of the meadows, lifted the village and our whole world above the dismalness of thatch and mud.

Their love of color was as much a part of our girls as their gaiety and song. Perhaps it was because their girlhood was so short-lived that they sought to crowd it with enjoyment. They matured early. At fifteen they were full-grown women with high breasts and the gleam of feminine challenge in their eyes. They were welcomed to dances and socials, and summers they rode the family horses with other young people to the community pasture for the night. Between fifteen and the day of their marriage at seventeen or eighteen they were the most joyous souls in the village. Never again were they to be as lighthearted and free. Never again would they need to fight so little with men, including their own fathers, for the privileges they sought to enjoy. Never again would they be so envied by their married sisters and their mothers. If they were *krasavitsas*—beauties—they were little heroines in their homes, in their villages, in the whole countryside. The richest boys—youths in stiff-edged caps with gleaming visors, in embroidered blouses and in smart leather boots—came to woo them, often from faraway places.

Not always did our girls have their way in the choice of a husband. They frequently had to suppress their romantic yearnings. The cupidity of parents overrode love. Then, of course, tragedy ensued and continued sometimes throughout life. But until the time when they journeyed to church for the marriage ceremony they were almost as free as all young things in nature to indulge their love of fun and adventure. Of course it was different if they were orphans; then a stern stepfather or stepmother often shut the very sun from their eyes.

In the presence of strangers, especially people in city clothes, our girls were always shy, but in the midst of acquaintances they bubbled with talk. As easy with tears as were their mothers, they seldom yielded to rancor so readily or indulged in vituperation so

thoughtlessly, except possibly in their very young years. They laughed more readily than the married women or than any of the men. Easily amused, they broke into mirth on the least provocation. Though always quick to resent insults, they played endless tricks on others with as much zest as the boys did, and at every little triumph they danced and shouted with glee. When, for example, Fyodr the Potato, a handsome, stocky youth with light hair and deep blue eyes, had proclaimed publicly that he never would get married because all girls were "stinking nuisances," they responded to the challenge with inordinate enthusiasm. Whenever they saw Fyodr at a gathering or sitting alone on the log in front of his house, they sneaked up unheard, flung their arms round him and pleaded with feigned earnestness, 'Fyodr darling, I'd love to be your stinking nuisance; come, say you'll make me your wife." Fyodr's sputtering protests and excited efforts to unclasp the assailant provided no end of merriment to bystanders and to no one so much as to the girls.

In course of time Fyodr the Potato came to be known as Fyodr the Stinker.

Our girls loved gingersnaps, pumpkin seeds, cucumbers, dried fruit, white bread and, above all, sugar. In the absence of ice cream, candy and the other delicacies that clutter the shelves of American confectionery shops, sugar was a luxury of luxuries. During the Christmas and New Year's holidays, which lasted uninterruptedly for nearly two weeks, the boys treated them to little lumps of the coveted sweet. Putting the sugar to their lips they sucked at it, nibbled it, and held it under the tongue so as to prolong the enjoyment of its precious sweetness. Because girls treasured it so highly, boys who were unable to obtain money with which to buy sugar did not hesitate to steal a measure of rye, barley or some other grain from their own father or from a neighbor and exchange it in the market place for a few lumps of sugar. On festive occasions they would not cheat their favorite girls of the most exciting gift that they could offer them.

Our girls drank very sparingly of vodka and mead. At a festive gathering they might for the sake of sociability gulp down a small

glass of one or the other. But that was all. They could never be persuaded to drink to a point of intoxication. With loud giggles they ran from people who sought to coax or scold them into taking another drink. Not only was it *neprilichno* (improper or indecent) for a girl to drink to excess, but except for the knowledge of her lack of virginity, nothing was so fatal to her chance of making a good match. Her industry was as much an asset to matrimony as was her comeliness, and nothing could be more destructive of her reputation than insobriety. Parents would be even more vehement in their denunciation of such derelictions than would their sons, and without parental consent matches were usually impossible.

I had never known or heard of a girl in our village who drank to the point of becoming tipsy, even at a wedding, which often enough turned into an alcoholic debauch for older people and for boys. At the bazaar, town girls might guzzle vodka as avidly as men; but not peasant girls—never!

Above all, our girls loved to sing. At an early age, listening to their sisters and mothers, they learned the songs that had been passed on from generation to generation. Unlike boys, who began singing only when they became emotionally aware of girls, they took to song as soon as they learned to carry a tune. At seven or eight, while pasturing geese in a meadow, gathering baskets of nettles for the pigs, plucking sorrel leaves for soup or picking mushrooms, they always sang, their tender voices floating high and bright over the village and echoing and re-echoing in the forest. The older they grew the more gladly they sang. On their way to and from work, bending over grain with a sickle or over potato hills with a hoe, at weddings and other festivities, song poured out of them as bountifully as from our ever-present and ever-warbling skylarks. The themes of the songs were chiefly tragic, telling of sickness, death, jilted love, abusive stepmothers, the woes of married life, the beauty and devastation of nature, and seldom of the sheer joy of living, of which our girls were so superb an incarnation.

Only one thing completely disgraced a girl in the old village—sex relationship before marriage. Her virginity was her greatest asset, greater than her beauty and her industriousness, for no amount

of either could wipe out the stigma of lost maidenhood. Once gone, everything was lost, and a pall of gloom settled over her joyous heart and her young life. She was no longer welcome at socials. Admirers ceased to visit her, suitors gave up courting her, girl friends often enough avoided her. In her home she was a pariah, her father beat her, her mother cursed her. A widower much older than herself, perhaps with a houseful of children, was about the only man who would marry her.

Nor was it easy for her to hide the transgression even if it didn't result in pregnancy. Often enough the guilty boy disclosed it to his friends or betrayed it by his contemptuous indifference to her. And even when he made no mention of it, there was the stern questioning to which she was subjected by her own mother on the day of her wedding, at the very doorway of the barn to which the groom was taking her for their first nuptial intimacy in the haymow. No girl, however virtuous, relished this questioning, which was as much a part of her wedding as the church ceremony. However, once her virginity was established it was publicly proclaimed by the fiddler, not in words, but by a red ribbon which he tied to the fiddle. Even children knew the meaning of this symbol and joined in the hilarity which followed its appearance.

When Adarya, Mother's best friend, got married, she broke down under her mother's sharp questioning and confessed that she was not without sin. Enraged by the confession, the mother slapped Adarya on the cheeks and scorched her with curses.

"Who'd ever have thought," the mother shouted, "that you would bring such evil and disgrace on your own home and on the man who made you his wife? Oh, you crow, you beast, you fiend, you daughter of an unclean spirit!"

Oddly enough, the groom's mother came to Adarya's rescue. Brushing aside the infuriated woman, she stooped over the prostrate bride and said:

"Who was your deceiver?"

Choked with tears and shame, Adarya for a long time remained silent.

"Who was he—tell me—fear nothing—I'll help you avenge the insult. Come, Daryechka, speak, who was he?"

Pointing with her eyes at her crestfallen groom, she stammered out:

"His brother, your older son, little mother."

"Fie, fie, fie!" the mother-in-law spat out in relief. Turning to the bride's mother, she said:

"It was no stranger, you see? Only my older son—a member of the family—so it doesn't matter much, does it?"

The mother agreed that the sin was less horrible than she had imagined.

As a boy I played with girls as much as with boys. They were our equals in everything we did. They ran races as well as we and raided orchards with no less zest. They did not fight as much, unless they were hit first or had their hair pulled. Then they struck out with hands and feet and scratched our faces as savagely as we scratched theirs. Some of them were as skilled in climbing trees as we were, and as eagerly searched for birds' nests. If they had freckles they smeared their faces with the contents of birds' eggs. Boys of course didn't mind freckles; often they were proud of them and were quick and savage in avenging jeers at a freckled face or nose.

Though always comradely with each other, sometimes if a girl refused to share an apple or a cucumber with a boy he did not scruple to snatch it from her. If she resisted—and unless caught unawares she always did—it was not always the boy who came out victor in the scuffle. Often enough it was he who ran home crying with pain and humiliation and wiping the blood from his scratched cheeks.

It was after such a scuffle with Anna, the daughter of Ilyuk, the village elder, that I was suddenly startled into an awareness of an emotion that thrilled and bewildered me.

I loved fruit. I could make a meal of bread and an apple or a pear —a good meal. But we had no orchard, not a single fruit tree. Sometimes a neighbor would give me an apple, sometimes I would snatch it from the hand of a playmate, a boy or a girl. The priest in the neighboring village of B———, who had the most magnificent orchard in the whole countryside, always gave me a pocketful of

fruit if he happened to be around when I was passing his place. Now and then a Jewish peddler stopping at our house for the night would present Mother with a basket of fruit which he got from a peasant in exchange for some wares.

But these were uncertain sources of supply. Now I had fruit, now for days I had none at all, and here were Petrok and Kondrat and Zakhar and other peasants, our immediate neighbors, or living in more remote parts of the village, with trees laden with glistening apples and pears. I did not expect them to be freely and continually doling out fruit to me, any more than I expected Mother to be freely giving away her cucumbers to people who might be wanting them. Anyone who had fruit needed it badly enough—to eat with bread on fast days or on holidays, and to dry it in the sun and make soup of it in winter. Yet other people had fruit and I did not. The only way I could get it was to steal it after dark in the orchards of our neighbors.

Sometimes I went stealing fruit alone, sometimes with other boys. Now and then girls joined us on these foraging expeditions. They made superb watchmen and shouted their heads off when they saw or heard someone stirring suspiciously toward us. When we were caught, we were soundly thrashed, then led like prisoners to our fathers and mothers for further punishment. Still, when the appetite for fruit was irresistible I gave little thought to hazards. No one else in our family was so given to stealing fruit as I was. Indeed, it became my favorite sport. When the inevitable hand seized me by my collar, I tried to bite and scratch my way to liberty, which sometimes I gained. The enraged peasant chased after me, shouting threats and oaths, and whether he caught me or not he never failed to report the offense to Mother, as well as denounce her for having so rascally a son. Jealous as she was of her reputation, Mother's reckonings on such occasions left me painfully blistered.

One afternoon, coming out of our garden, I saw Anna walk past holding a large pear in each hand and absent-mindedly humming a tune. I asked her for one of her pears, but she refused to give it to me. I repeated my request, and again she refused. I offered to pick a cucumber in exchange, but she was not tempted. Instead she

started running toward her house, which was opposite our garden and some distance away from our house. I gave chase, and when I caught up with her she kicked and scratched, but I got away with one of her pears. Crying, she threw handfuls of mud at me and then ran into the house. I went back to the garden and started eating the pear.

Presently her father came out. Short, bowlegged, with broad shoulders and a copper-red face, he made for our garden. Instantly I threw away the unfinished pear and was ready to run.

"Don't run," he called. "I won't touch you."

Had it been anyone else, I should have paid no heed to the promise. But Ilyuk's integrity was unimpeachable, and even children knew it. Though a poor man, he never took bribes and never scolded and abused people if they failed punctually to fulfill the obligations which the government or the village imposed on them.

He drew close, not too close, for he knew that, though I might trust him, I should not be too sure of him if he were near enough to strike me.

"What did you do to my Annushka?" he asked.

"I didn't do anything," I protested.

"You grabbed a pear out of her hand and frightened her so she is still crying."

I was silent.

"I ought to tell your mother."

He must have read guilt and repentance in my face, for presently he said:

"If you wanted a pear so badly, why didn't you come to me and ask for it? I might have given it to you."

I remained silent.

"Will you promise not to do it again?"

"Will you tell Mother?"

"Not if you promise never to do it again."

I promised. Without further censure Ilyuk walked to his home. I felt so grateful to him for not beating me, and even more for his promise to say nothing to Mother, that I decided to make amends to Anna at the first possible opportunity. Besides, the thought that she might still be crying, as her father had said she was, stirred

my remorse. After all, she had as much right to her pears as I had to my cucumbers. I knew that Ilyuk's cucumbers had burned up that summer, but ours were as good as any Mother had ever raised. I was sure, therefore, that Anna could be reconciled by a gift of cucumbers. Any girl or boy could be won to peace and friendship by such a gift.

The next morning I searched for Anna in the yard of her home. I called her name, and her mother came out of the house. Eyeing me sullenly, she asked if I wanted to steal another pear from her daughter. Angry at the reminder of my misdeed, I left and went to our garden, resolved to wait until I saw Anna. Presently she appeared with a little wooden keg slung on her back. I saw her go to the well, fill the keg with water and start for the field. I called after her. Turning quickly, she paused and, seeing who it was, turned again and went on her way. Again I called and begged her to stop, and this time she did and waited until I came over. I had a large cucumber in each hand.

"Here," I said, "take these."

Gladly she took the cucumbers, thrust them into the bosom of her dress and thanked me.

"Are you still angry with me?" I asked.

She shook her head.

"I'll never take pears away from you again."

Barefooted and bareheaded, with her gray linen dress reaching to her knees, her braid of soft brown hair shimmering in the sun, she was visibly pleased with the gift, and as we looked at each other she smiled, a shy friendly smile. Suddenly I wondered how it had happened that I had never been in any games with her. Of course she lived some distance from our house and usually we chose playmates in our immediate neighborhood. I had seen her many times, but I had never given her a thought. She was just a girl, one more girl in the village, with no special claim to distinction. Yet now her simplicity, her trimness, her reserve, her friendliness stirred in me a pleasurable sensation. She was no longer just another girl, a possible playmate. She was someone with an appeal that transcended mere companionship and that roused a longing which I had never before experienced.

"If you ever want a cucumber," I said, "will you let me know?"

She nodded and smiled again, the same shy, friendly, captivating smile.

"And next time you have pears will you give me one?"

Again she nodded and turned her large blue eyes on me, and more than ever I was conscious of something wild and pleasant stirring inside me. I wanted to escort her to the field, but her mother came out and shouted to her not to tarry with the water, as her father might be parching with thirst. Her mother's scolding voice disconcerted both of us, and we parted.

The next morning Mother sent me to the garden to pick a basketful of vegetables. As I was stooping over an onion bed, I heard a rustle. Looking up, I saw Anna with a handful of pears.

"Here," she said and offered me the pears.

I loaded her with cucumbers. Her face shone with pleasure as she skipped over a bed of beets and started for home. As I followed her with my eyes, I again wondered how it had happened that I had never played with her or singled her out for special favors. No one in the village seemed so lovely or so worthy of attention. I was glad she did not live in our neighborhood. I could see her often without rousing the suspicion of Mother or anyone else in the family. I did not want them to know that I liked her, or that I was stirred by any girl in the village. They would tease me endlessly; Mother might scold me, and then I might not dare to see much of her, and I wanted to see her and be with her more than with any girl I knew.

Afterwards I began to visit her part of the village and play games with the boys and girls there more often than with those in my immediate neighborhood.

Once a group of us went to the woods to pick mushrooms. We decided to have a race to see who would be first to fill a half-bushel measure. We scattered in all directions; I started off with Anna and found myself stealthily throwing handfuls of mushrooms into her basket. Every time I did so, she smiled with appreciation. On espying a patch of mushrooms beyond a stretch of shrubs, I took her hand and beckoned to her to follow. So thick were they growing that we scooped them up by the handful. When her basket was full she dashed into the clearing, emptied it into the measure and, squatting down beside it, shouted with triumph, "Look, everybody, look." She won the race, and I enjoyed her triumph as much as she

did. On our way home, I put my arm round her and kissed her, but she gave me a violent push and ran away.

Months later, on my return from school for my vacation, I went to see her. She had grown perceptibly in the time that I had been away. Her face was broader, her eyes more luminous, so it seemed to me, and her bosom was rising under her linen shirt. In the presence of older people and strangers she was as shy as ever, and my student uniform made her at first a little wary of me. She blushed easily, and whenever a boy pulled her braid of hair too suddenly or too strongly she no longer sulked but giggled as she vigorously slapped his hands. Evenings when girls gathered on the little pile of timber outside her house for a singing party she usually sang the solo parts. She had a thin soprano voice and sang with joy and fervor. At one of these parties, in between songs I twined her braid round my hand precisely as I had seen grown boys do to their girls at spinning socials. At first she only giggled, but when my hand reached her head she put hers on mine and, smiling, asked me to stop. I did, but not without drawing her so close that our heads touched and I could feel the warmth of her cheek against mine.

Other boys and girls began to tease us about each other, but I did not mind as long as nobody in our house knew anything, and because she did not live in our immediate neighborhood the teasing never got as far as our house.

One afternoon she asked if I would help drive her goslings to pasture. Readily I assented. The pasture was a meadow from which the hay had already been removed, only a short distance away from the village. On one side it was bordered by a wood and on the other by patches of flax and potatoes. Other boys and girls pastured their goslings on their strips of meadow in the same field. It was a sunny afternoon, and a large crowd of us had gathered for fun and play. We ran races; we went swimming; we built a fire and baked beets, which we stole from near-by gardens. Then we formed a group to go picking blueberries. Anna went along, leaving her goslings in charge of another girl. Hardly had we gotten to the berry bushes when we heard a fierce scream. Instantly we rushed back to the pasture. Amidst loud tears, the little girl who had been guarding Anna's goslings informed us that a hawk had swooped

down and carried off one of them. Shaking with fright, Anna counted her goslings; there were only ten, and there should have been eleven. Dropping prostrate on the grass, she pulled at her hair and cried aloud without let-up. Nothing any of us did or said gave her comfort, not even my assurance that her father, kindly as he was and loving her as he did, would not punish her for the mishap and would not let her mother punish her. But she kept on crying. She could never forgive herself for going off to pick berries when she should have tended her goslings and protected them from the wicked hawk. Afraid lest a hawk swoop down over their birds, the other boys and girls dispersed to look after their flocks in their own strips of pasture.

I drove Anna's goslings together and brought them close to where she was, on the edge of the field of flax. Then I sat down beside her. Presently she stopped crying, and while her bosom still heaved with sobs she proceeded to wipe her eyes with her fists. Again I sought to solace her. She looked so pathetic and tender now that I was overcome with pity and affection for her. In an instant I flung my arms round her and kissed her on the cheek. She gave a little cry and quickly drew away. I removed my arms from her and told her I liked her. She made no reply. I told her I would go on liking her better than any girl in the village or in the town where I went to school. At the moment I wished that we were both grown up so that we could feel free to do as we pleased without rousing the mockery of brothers and sisters and the possible wrath of our mothers. We could go to dances and socials, ride on horseback to *nochleg* and there in the communal pasture sleep beside each other, like other boys and girls who liked each other, and cover ourselves with the same sheepskin coats or the immense homespun hemp blanket. But she was only twelve and I but a few months older!

Still the thought of going on *nochleg* with her was overpowering, and I could not help saying:

"Anna, when d'you think you'll start going on *nochleg?*"

"Maybe next summer, when my brother gets married."

Married men, unless absolutely obliged to do so, did not go on *nochleg*. They stayed home with their wives, and since all the other

children in Ilyuk's family were younger than Anna, the job of riding the horse to the communal pasture at night would pass on to her. Thrilled with her answer, I said:

"Maybe, when you start going on *nochleg,* I'll be going too?"

"But your mother has no horse any more!"

True, the last horse we had Mother had long ago sold.

"I'll be going to see you."

She smiled.

"And will you be my girl on *nochleg* and let me sleep beside you on the grass?"

"Maybe."

I flung my arms round her again, but she edged out of my embrace.

"I won't let you sleep beside me if you're going to act like this."

"Maybe next summer, when you're older, you'll want me to?"

She gave a gay laugh.

"Say you will, please say it."

"Maybe," and she leaned so close that I embraced and kissed her, and this time she offered no resistance.

The next summer Anna's brother got married, and she started riding her father's horse on *nochleg.* By that time we were already making ready to depart for America.

## CHAPTER VII

## *America*

WHILE DIGGING POTATOES and loading them in huge baskets into the wagon, my older sister injured her leg so badly that she could not rise out of bed. Mother drove her to town to consult a physician, and after examining her he advised that she be taken at once to the capital of the province for an examination by a noted surgeon. Mother had never been in the capital, nor had anyone else in our village, save the boys who went to the army, and old Yevdokim, who was once summoned there as a witness in a trial. On his return he announced with loud dismay that never in his life had he seen

so monstrous an incarnation of the Evil One as in the capital—a vast aggregation of iron moving by itself without the help of a single horse. It was the first time he had seen a railroad train.

Now Mother had to go there and travel on the new "devil," of which Yevdokim had spoken with such violent consternation. She was not frightened, nor was my sister.

The noted surgeon advised amputation, but my sister screamed that she would rather die than lose her leg. Another surgeon advised against amputation, and for months no one could tell which surgeon was right. Eventually she got well.

Shortly afterwards another sister met with a tragic accident. Only eight years old, with flaxen hair, deep blue eyes, an ineffaceable flush on her round cheeks, she and a playmate were amusing themselves by hopping over the top of freshly stacked piles of firewood. While she was making a leap from one pile to another, the sticks under her gave way and she tumbled to the ground head first, with layers of wood on top of her. Her playmate quickly cleared away the wood and helped her to the house. Afraid of being scolded, especially as she had torn her dress, she crawled under the bed and remained in hiding. At suppertime she was not at the table. A search was started, and when she was discovered under the bed her teeth chattered, her face was white and stiff, and she was unconscious Instantly Mother engaged a peasant and drove to town to consult a physician. Because of the deep mud the journey took hours longer than usual. After one glance at the sick girl the physician said it was too late to do anything. She died shortly after arrival in town. The favorite in the family, her death was a crushing blow to us all.

Then Father died.

Then another sister fell ill with typhoid and was not expected to live.

Then Mother broke down with a siege of fevers, and we thought she was going to die.

Coming one after another, these events cast a heavy gloom over our household. Death had been a frequent visitor to our village. The epidemics that periodically swept over it—typhoid, diphtheria, scarlet fever—carried off many lives. Our nearest neighbor, Adarya, gave birth to a child every year and with the exception of Sergey,

her oldest son and my closest playmate, they all died before attaining their first birthday. Funerals were commonplace events, especially in autumn and spring. More people, children in particular, died during these seasons than at any other time. Yet our household had been spared the visitation of death. Only one of Mother's eleven children had been taken. We were the envy of our neighbors, and of no one so much as of Adarya. Now death had not only invaded our household but threatened to keep up the onslaught. Who would be next? The question tormented me, and whenever I heard dogs baying at the moon I wondered if Mother would follow Father or if someone else was destined for seizure by "the slaughterer of man" whom only dogs could see on moonlit nights. Though I had already been attending school and had been introduced to Pushkin, Gogol, Turgenev, Tolstoy, the hold of legend on my mind remained unshattered.

Mother recovered, not completely but sufficiently to resume the arduous task of providing a living for the family. She kept a cow and a calf. She raised hens and geese. She cultivated a garden and a few strips of land outside of the village. To augment her income, she opened a little shop. Peasants encouraged her to expand the shop, so that they could buy everything they needed from her. Lacking capital, she had to content herself with selling kerosene, matches, soap and a few other household necessities.

Usually peasants made their purchases on credit and paid with their produce, chiefly grain, after they had gathered their harvests. Sometimes they brought their grain in a wagon, sometimes on their backs, and sometimes Mother had to go and collect it in person and haul it home on her own back. Staff in hand and bent under a load, she trudged for days from one end of the village to the other, shouting and swearing at the dogs, shaking her staff at them. So busy was she with her work that she had no time except on the Sabbath to think and weep over her misfortunes. Friday evenings she always wept copiously.

One day several neighbors came to see her. They said they were worried about her, and with good reason. Her husband was dead, her two oldest sons were in the army, and she had no grown man

in the house to help her with a word of advice and with the work on the land Her store was too small to provide her with the income she needed; why then didn't she sell vodka? True enough the sale of vodka was a government monopoly, and no one outside of the government was allowed to dispense it. But what of that? People might as well dig their graves and lie down in them and await their death as obey all the laws with which officials were seeking to strangle muzhiks. As for the village elder whose duty it was to enforce the laws, Mother need have no worries about him. He was an understanding man and liked a tumblerful of vodka as much as anyone. He never would say anything.

Mother shuddered at the suggestion. If ever an inspector found bottles of vodka in the house she would be so heavily fined that she would need to sell the cow and the calf and perhaps everything else she had, and then what would she do? But the neighbors laughed at her fears. They would take care of the inspector. He was no magician and did not fall out of the sky like a drop of rain or shoot out of the earth like a stalk of rye. He had to drive in from the outside, and he always traveled in a government carriage, and government carriages had loud bells on top of the bows over their horses, and therefore he could always be heard before he was seen If they were out in the field and heard the bell, which they could easily recognize, they would drop their work, run to her house, pick up the bottles of vodka, carry them in baskets to their barns, bury them in chaff or straw, and then the inspector would feel no better than a groom at a wedding from which the bride had fled. She need have no fears of him. They would protect her against his depredations, and they knew how. It wasn't the first time they had outsmarted inspectors. Meanwhile, she could sell vodka at the same price at which the government was selling it, only she would get back the empty bottles, and when she had a lot of them she could take them to the government shop, exchange them for cash, and that would be her profit.

Still Mother hesitated. For a widow without a grown man in the house, the enterprise loomed too risky. But the neighbors would not yield. They grew increasingly more eloquent and more persuasive. She must go ahead with their proposal. Besides, it was time someone in the village sold vodka. They were tired of having to

hitch up a horse and wagon and drive to the government shop every time they wanted to celebrate, and what with holidays, christenings, weddings, funerals, spurts of good fellowship when folk wanted to invite neighbors and make merry, and with so many families in the village, celebrations were as plentiful as muzhiks to enjoy them. Why then hesitate? She would do herself an enormous good at a time when she needed desperately to keep hunger from her door, and she would be performing a needed public service which every man in the village would appreciate and never forget!

In the end Mother capitulated, and the peasants were as good as their word. The moment they heard the bell of a government carriage and thought it might be the inspector, they rushed to our house, hurriedly gathered all bottles of vodka and carried them off to their barns. As soon as the inspector drove off, they brought them all back.

Once an inspector found in our living room a tubful of empty vodka bottles. He ransacked the house in search of vodka and, finding none, he turned in fury to the peasants who had been watching him and shouted:

"Where does she keep her vodka?"

"You mean, Your Excellency, where do we keep it," rejoined one of the men, a noted village wit.

"Well, where do you keep it?" the inspector demanded hotly.

"In our bellies, Your Excellency!"

In no mood for jesting, the inspector swore at the peasant, and when he calmed down the peasant staunchly remarked:

"It's the truth I've told you, Your Excellency."

Mother was terror-stricken because, while the peasants had removed all the bottles of vodka from the house, she had neglected to tell them that she had stored a tubful of them in the cellar.

"Where do you keep your vodka? You'd better tell me!" the inspector shouted at Mother.

"You have searched the house, Your Excellency, and you have found nothing. There is my cellar. Why don't you go down there and search it?"

Trembling all over, Mother led the way to the cellar, and the inspector followed her to the door.

"The devil with your cellar and with all of you!" he cried in disgust and, leaping into his carriage, he drove away.

The other evening I asked Mother whether in all the years she had lived in the village she had ever noted any manifestation of anti-Semitism on the part of any of our neighbors, or of any peasants in any of the villages in our part of the country. Her answer was an emphatic No. I put the same question to my older brother and sister, and they replied with an equally emphatic No. As for myself, I had never heard the word "anti-Semitism" until I went to town and entered school. Under the Czar, Russia might have been the classic land of anti-Semitism, with Jews in the ghetto in constant dread of repressions and pogroms. But our village was as innocent of such evil-doing as the magnificent herons that brought us good luck when they built their nests on the roofs of our barns. Outwardly the differences between ourselves and our neighbors were quite manifest. Our religion and our language were different, though we could speak their language as well as they did. We observed dietary laws which did not in any way parallel the food restrictions by which they had to abide. Yet neither they nor we were conscious of marked social cleavages. We had as deep roots in the village as they, and we visited back and forth without any thought of the one or the other being superior or inferior. If ever a passing Jewish peddler, a man from town, uttered a derogatory word about our muzhiks, Father was quick to express his resentment. I am sure that if pogrom makers from the outside had ever come to our village to stage an attack, our peasants would have risen en masse to defend us. Basically we lived the same kind of a life as they did. We were engaged in the same struggle with the land, the mud, the hawks, the crows, the Evil One, above all with the uniformed government officials who extorted from us sacks of rye, oats, potatoes, eggs, butter and anything else we might have in the house when they were around.

Since then I have journeyed far and wide in Russian villages, in Europe and in Asia, and greater than ever is my conviction that, whatever his vices or virtues, left to himself the Russian peasant is a stranger to racial prejudice and social discrimination. Given free vodka, the promise of government protection and the lure of loot,

some of them, especially in the Ukraine, did in the past embark on pogroms against Jews, but only some of them. I am sure that no instigations and no promise of loot could ever have swayed our peasants into the least infringement on the lives and possessions of Jews. To this day I do not know how we should have survived our miseries in the old home, had it not been for the endless favors our neighbors bestowed on us, and always with a glad heart.

Once a team drove up to our house, and two men came in to see Mother. Grave and taciturn, they were obviously messengers of bad news. They told Mother they had come to collect a debt on a note which Father had signed before his death. Mother disowned the note and the debt and said she had nothing to pay it with, anyway. The men insisted they would collect something, even if it was only the hay in our barn. They proceeded to the barn, ready to take away the two loads of hay that Mother had stored up for the winter. When Mother realized that she could not dissuade the strangers from taking the hay, without which she could not keep her cow and have milk to put in our soups and supply us with the fats we needed, she prostrated herself on the ground before the barn door and exclaimed, amidst wrath and tears:

"Go ahead, you wicked men, take the hay, every spear of it, and leave me and my children to starve, but I warn you you'll never haul it out of the barn except over my dead body."

The men tried to lift her from the ground, but with her hands and feet she fought them off. They argued, expostulated, begged, and threatened to come back with the constable. Mother would listen to neither threat nor persuasion.

"Over my dead body," she screamed, "only over my dead body!"

Sighing and swearing, and again threatening to come back with the constable and confiscate everything she had, the two men left and never returned.

When my oldest brother came home from the army, in which he had served four years, and saw the wreckage that had come over our household, he was heartbroken. Only one cow, one calf, a few hens, less than two dessiatines of land, and not even a horse any more! What could he do now? What future was there for him in

the village? Without money to buy a horse and another cow and to rent more land, he would only stagnate and sink deeper and deeper into the mud that was darkening the life of the whole village. Besides, there had been these sicknesses and deaths in the family, and premonition brooded heavily over our household. We had been spared death so long, but now the inexorable law of the village, which smote down child after child and so many grown folk in every family, was perhaps beginning a fateful reckoning with us, and if so, how could we escape?

Obviously, there was no place in the village for a young man with the energy and ambition of my brother, and he decided to forge his destiny elsewhere. . . . Luckily it was a time when a whole new world was offering itself to men like him. He would go to this new world.

Columbus may have discovered America in the fifteenth century, but our village had heard neither of him nor of America until the beginning of the twentieth century. The news first leaked in through King, the Jewish peddler who was gathering flax and bristles for America. Not that anyone cared a straw where our flax and bristles went, any more than we cared where our eggs and rye and barley were sent. Flax and bristles fetched a higher price than ever; that was something. But America was just a name, not important enough to be a mystery. Germany also was a name, and Turkey and England were names. Only France was no mere name, because of the legends of Napoleon getting sunk in our mud, and even more because, if you were infuriated with someone, you shouted at him, "A French plague on you!" and the French plague was syphilis. King, of course, felt that in buying bristles for America he was performing an exalted mission. But King, with his tangled black beard and his high-pitched voice and his greasy coat, had not the power to make real and humanize for us the meaning of America

Then, of a sudden, as though the sky had cloven open and a voice from above had thundered the news upon us, there was a roar of excitement about America. Even Ivan the Fool, blind in one red-filmed eye, and always fighting with his wife because he seldom brought her herring from the market place and not even a nibble of sugar to sweeten her mouth, was roused to curiosity.

The beggars talked about it, especially the Jewish beggars, who in their journeyings about the world had heard and known of people who were departing or making ready to depart for America. Then the non-Jewish beggars picked up the exciting news. If America had not been so far away and required so much money to reach, they might not be averse to trying their luck there with their songs and their lyres, because in America beggars were receiving, not lumps of black bread, cold griddle cakes and slices of hard-boiled eggs, but cash, which they could carry in their pockets or in a little sack hung from their necks against their skin. Then they no longer would have to lug their alms from place to place in heavy baskets or sacks.

Then passing gypsies began to talk of America. If they knew there was much horse trading in America, they would flee there at once and save themselves the agony of arguing the virtues of their horses with bumptious and stubborn muzhiks who never looked at a gypsy's horse but suspected stones had been put inside its belly to make it look rounded and well-fed.

Then the merchants who came to buy our grain and the lumbermen who came to hire our young men to roll logs out of their forests began to talk of America and to wonder openly and loquaciously whether or not they, with their special talents, were not wasting their lives in Russia, where they were only earning roubles while in America even muzhiks were earning dollars.

Then we saw people driving through our village in holiday clothes, as good sometimes as any of our landlords wore, and with sacks in their wagons, not tied but sewed together, and they were actually starting for America.

Then, at the bazaar, one often stumbled on a crowd that listened eagerly to a man whose cousin or brother-in-law had written a letter from America and had sent a sum of money home, five or ten roubles, which his family had already collected in the post office in five- and ten-rouble gold pieces. Gold, real gold, sent all the way from America!

The boom was on and was gathering momentum with every week, almost every day.

For our muzhiks the news was at first too bewildering to be true. They had known people who had been in the capital of the province

and in Warsaw. A few older persons had actually gone on a pilgrimage to Kiev. In a neighboring village there was a young man who had visited Moscow. But never had they heard of anyone going to America, and now people were rushing there. Why? Because America had sent out a call that she needed men, all the men who wanted to come, if only they were in good health and their eyes were untainted with a disease known as trachoma. When Ivan the Fool heard of the healthy eyes he announced publicly, and with no little acrimony, that it was all a villainous fraud, because there was no such a land as America. But nobody cared for his opinions, for was not he Ivan the Fool? Besides, people were actually going to America, and not only impoverished Jews from the towns but land-poor muzhiks from the villages, more and more of them. Mothers and fathers were selling their only horse to obtain money for the journey of their son. They expected to be repaid many times over, because America not only promised work (and there were people in the town who could show documents in which this promise was officially proclaimed) but paid well for it, and not in green cardboard checks like the landlords, but in cash, in dollars, and each dollar was worth two czarist roubles. The least any man could earn, so ran the legend, was one dollar a day—one dollar or two roubles in one day, six dollars or twelve roubles in one week, more than some landlords paid a hired man for the whole winter! Why then slave on a landlord's estate or roll logs for a lumberman or haul grain for a merchant and get soaked in rain or sunk in mud, and have only a pittance for the travail and the toil?

Moneylenders gladly financed trips to America, because they knew that the man who went there could pay off the debt quickly at the rate of at least two roubles a week, if only his family at home would underwrite the obligation.

Tempting every appetite man possessed were the stories of life in America. Anybody could buy fat meat there, all he wanted and cheap, and children would not need to scramble for the fat morsels during a holiday feast. Black bread nobody ate, not even beggars. Nor did anyone ever use wrapping paper or newspaper or the copybooks of school children, which he might buy in the bazaar for rolling cigarettes. The poorest man could afford cigarette paper, as fine and soft as the down off the feather of a fat goose, and

everyone always drank tea sweet with sugar dissolved in the glass instead of being nibbled from the piece. Nor did anybody in America ever bother to wear white linen trousers on holidays. People had trousers made out of factory-made cloth and of any color they chose—red, green, yellow, blue, like those of the landlords and their children when they dressed up for riding horseback. Soap too was cheap, and the poorest people washed themselves with it, not once a week or before holidays, but every day and several times a day, and women never had to wash their linens with yellow sand that they scooped with their hands out of the bottom of the river—they had all the soap in the world for their linens.

Best of all, nobody was obliged to go to the army and serve four, five, six years and not be paid enough for his tobacco. There, if a man worked during the years that he was in the czar's army, he could earn enough to buy all the land he cared to possess, provided of course he saved it and came home and put it in land before he had squandered it on vodka. And if a man went into the army in America he ate lots of meat and white bread and sugar, and he wore nice clothes and could save twenty and more roubles a month. This was more than clerks in the most select shops in town were receiving, and they had been to school and wore swanky clothes and sometimes made a muzhik feel that they were soiling their souls by talking to him.

But how did people get to America?

Blind Sergey had collected an enormous mass of information on the subject. America was really right under the village, under our mud, all the way through the crust of the earth, and if a man could dig a hole through this crust, he would find himself, on reaching the other side, in America. But nobody could dig such a hole. It was hard enough to dig a well with the spades we had. That was why people going to America had to travel all the way around the earth, mainly by water. With the aid of a potato, Sergey demonstrated how people traveled round and round the earth until they got to a point that was directly opposite our village and that was America. Nobody believed him. An insane idea! People could not travel this way without falling off the earth. Suppose a barrel were hoisted in the air and someone tried to walk around its circum-

ference—wouldn't he fall off and break his neck and perhaps rip his belly to pieces? Sergey argued, orated, sweated, but not a soul would believe him. The earth was no more round than the fields on which rye and potatoes were grown.

Nevertheless people were going to America and were getting there and were writing letters home and sending money, and the money came in gold, five- and ten-rouble pieces. If a man had enough of these pieces of gold he would not need waste his life on a few strips of land, each strip no wider than the reach of his arms. He could go to the Polish landlord, the Russian landlord, the tricky and greedy German landlord, who had just bought a huge estate near by, and say to him: "Your Excellency, here is gold —a fistful of gold, a pocketful of gold, a sackful of gold. How about that section of your fine level loam next to your birch forest?"

Wouldn't the landlord's eyes pop out with surprise and joy? Wouldn't he grab the gold and hurry you to a notary to sign a document? And then you would have as fine land as there was in the countryside, and not a few miserable strips, but a sweeping stretch of it, perhaps all in one place, so you wouldn't need to go back and forth on foot or with horse and wagon from one strip to another. Then you could tear the thatch off your roof and use it for bedding the stable, and the roof you would cover with shingles and paint; and the windows, the shutters, the walls, inside and outside, you would also paint, precisely as did the little father of your church, or any landlord. Then you would never go barefooted, not even on weekdays, for you could always buy boots. Then you could buy sugar and drink sweet tea all the time, and dip your bread in sweet tea even on weekdays, and if your daughter was engaged to be married you could offer her a handsome dowry, and when the day came for you to die, you could instruct your wife or your son to give a sumptuous feast after your funeral and to put a big cross, made not of birch but of oak, over your grave! Then the most cherished dream would become the happiest fulfillment of your life.

My oldest brother was among the first to lead the exodus from our village.

## CHAPTER VIII

## *Farewell*

EARLY IN THE MORNING there began a procession of visitors to our house. They came from all parts of the village and from neighboring villages—men, women, children, mothers with babies in their arms, some in bark sandals, with immense linen wraps for socks, but most of them barefooted, with mud on feet and ankles. An entire family was leaving for America, an extraordinary event, something to ponder over and get excited about and to remember in the years to come.

We had our breakfast early, the usual breakfast—bread, potatoes, milk, tea. We ate heartily, except Mother, who was fatigued and distraught.

We were still in the old home, with its shingled roof, its large windows, its banks of sand round the foundations on the outside, its two big ovens, but soon we should be leaving it and bidding farewell to everything, farewell forever. At the moment the departure seemed unreal, like the death of a close friend with whom you had been talking only a short time before the news of his death reached your ears. Yet it was real, as much so as the bared walls in the house, the clutter of debris on the floor, the white sacks with our belongings, the absence of strutting and squawking hens—they were all gone now, sold off—and the presence of many solemn-faced neighbors and friends. Shtshepa alone, who lived across the street from us and was one of the most unhappy women in the village because she had borne no children, made us painfully aware of it. She was helping Mother with the last of the packing, and of a sudden she broke into a sob and said:

"We'll miss you, beloved. It's heartbreaking to see you go."

Many a time she had sobbed her heart out to Mother and had listened to Mother's comforting words. To her, Mother's departure was a grievous loss, and she could not hold back her tears. Adarya—also unhappy because, as already mentioned, her children (with the exception of her son Sergey), coming regularly once a year, never survived their first birthday—joined in the crying.

"You won't forget us, the unfortunates, will you? We'll be thinking of you every day, my dear."

The unfortunates! The word irked me. Perhaps it was because I had been to school and had learned to view with disapproval all forms of abasement. Why must Adarya, a handsome woman and as good a housekeeper as there was in the village, grovel so? Why must any muzhik grovel? True, save for her oldest son, Adarya had had the misfortune to lose all her children. Even so, she should know better than to divest herself, as she was now doing, of all pride and all self-control.

"I wish," I said, turning to her son Sergey, "your mother and mine didn't talk like that. We'll be coming back. It isn't as though we were going to die."

"You'll never come back," countered Sergey morosely.

"Of course we will, and it's silly of you to say we won't."

"People don't come back from America," he retorted in a tone of prophetic doom.

He was right, of course. At that time no one had returned from America. But then not so very many had yet gone. The fever was just spreading and the exodus just starting.

"Maybe you'll be coming to see us?" I said.

"No, I won't. Maybe I'll die soon like all my brothers and sisters."

Sergey often talked of death, and ordinarily I would have laughed at him, yet this time I didn't. Years later, when the news reached me that he was killed in France during the World War, I remembered his words. There always was an ominous note in his speech, as there was in his mother's. No other people in the village lived in such dread of death as they.

Anna came, as trim and shy and pretty as ever, with her long braid held together by a blue ribbon and her bare feet black with mud.

"I brought you something," she said. "Open your pocket."

I held my pocket open, and she emptied into it a little white sack of pumpkin seeds, still warm, evidently freshly dried in the oven.

"Good-by, Anna," I said and shook her hand.

"Good-by," she whispered and quickly went away. I would have kissed her only there were so many people in the house. For an instant I wished we were not going, not yet. I should have enjoyed

Anna's companionship now that she was beginning to be so vividly aware of herself as a girl and had already begun going on *nochleg*. Someone else would be sleeping by her side in the pasture on the grass—and the thought of it made me wince, but not for long. I could not remain absorbed in my own meditations when so many people were eyeing me with solemnity, as though I had all of a sudden ceased to be one of them or had dug a gulf which they could not stride over. I am sure it was not envy that made them look at me and the others in our family as they did. It might have been only regret, perhaps even pity.

More and more visitors were arriving. Never had there been such a crowd in our house, even on any of the winter evenings when men gathered to regale themselves with gossip and with tales of the Evil One. Some of the visitors brought us gifts—pumpkin seeds, dried fruit, freshly picked winter apples. They were all amazingly subdued. These muzhiks, who were easily excited and always talked in booming voices, were now strangely quiet and spoke in muffled tones. No one indulged in a jest. No one sought to lighten the gloom with a gay or witty word. No one laughed.

We had sold the house, the furniture, the cow, the calf, the hens, what little grain we had, and everything else but the pillows and the linens, which we were taking with us. Russian pillows and linens were valuable in America, and Mother would not dispense with them.

She went on with the packing and now and then broke into a sob.

Less than any of her children did she have reason for regret. No longer would she need to trudge in heavy boots in the deep mud, with heavy sacks on her back. No longer would she be harassed by angry and threatening creditors. No longer would she tremble with terror, on hearing the bells of an approaching carriage, lest it be a government inspector coming to search the house for bottles of vodka, which she was not permitted to sell. True, neighbors never failed to protect her from possible trouble, but there was always a chance that they might slip up on their vigilance. No longer would she be obliged to arise at dawn every morning, carry in the wood, the water, start the fires, milk the cow and drudge until late in the

evening in the effort to hold the family together and provide it with food and shelter. A comely girl of only nineteen, she had married a man more than twice her age, already a grandfather, and all her life she had been faced with hardship and sorrow. Whatever the burdens and the trials that awaited her in America, they could not possibly be as crushing and as void of hope as those she was leaving behind.

Above all she would not need to worry about the children. I had finished public school in town, a good school, but the road further was now blocked because of race and poverty. Over there the road would open again, and perhaps her dream of seeing me become a "learned" man would come true. The other children might likewise go to school. Schools would be free, and neither poverty nor race would keep the doors closed. That much she had been assured —and that was one of the chief reasons why she decided to leave the old home. And if any of us did not care for education he could go to work, for there always was work for every immigrant who arrived, young or old. Else why would people go to America? Didn't all the documents we read say that much and more? And of course people got paid handsomely for their work. In one day a man earned enough to buy yards and yards of calico, at least two sacks of rye, a whole little tub of butter. No place in Russia or in any other land held forth the promise that America did. And what was she leaving behind? Years of toil, worry, unhappiness and the interminable mud that had eaten itself into her very soul. Nothing really precious, not even dignity of person No, she had nothing to regret; she had everything to rejoice over. A new life beckoned to her, in itself a triumph. Yet she could not help being sad. She had struck deeper roots in the village than she had imagined, and she never had realized until this moment how deep they were. It hurt to pull them—made the heart bleed and the soul ache; and here were Shtshepa and Adarya helping her with the packing and reminding her of this ache.

It had been raining all night. Autumn was already upon us, wet, cold, muddy. The sky was overcast, and a shower threatened to splash down. For once Mother indulged in an extravagance: she engaged the well-known Konon to drive us to town. A man with a red beard, brilliant blue eyes and a soft tenor voice, Konon was

the best teamster in the village. Merchants and lumbermen, if ever they got stranded, always engaged him to drive them to their next destination. With his roan mare and black colt he earned more money driving people than any other man around our village. That was why he always wore boots. He had even been thinking of buying rubbers, which nobody in the village had ever worn. His large wagon with iron axles and steel-sheathed wheels, always amply greased so they wouldn't fly off the wagon, as well as his skill as a driver, was a guarantee of safety. Had Mother engaged anyone else to drive us on our last journey to town, Konon would have borne her a lasting grudge, and the whole village might have been as much dismayed as it would have been had a muzhik invited Ivan the Fool instead of the little father to administer the last rites to a dying man.

At last Konon arrived and stopped his wagon in front of the house. He had filled it with golden rye straw, and in back, where we were to sit, he had spread a clean home-woven hemp cloth. He had dressed up as for a holiday in white linen trousers and a gray shimmering woolen coat with flapping tails. Nor had he neglected to give his boots a fresh coating of grease so that they gleamed brilliantly between the creases of his leggings. But even he, the great Konon, had no hood to his wagon, for only landlords or city people could afford such protection against storms. Should a shower burst on us, we should have to cover ourselves with anything at our disposal or crawl under the straw, and if the shower was heavy and lasted long enough, we should not escape a drenching. But then . . .

Pipe in mouth, Konon entered the house, and in spite of his freshly greased boots, his white linen trousers, his shimmering woolen coat, everyone felt as though an evil spirit had made its appearance. For the moment he became the symbol of the power that was to bring the impending tragedy to consummation. "Time to get started," he said incisively. He was logical enough. The sooner we started, the better the chances of escaping the shower. But why bother about showers now? Had not we always got drenched by showers? One more soaking would hardly matter. Could not he wait awhile longer? We had waited for years, indeed all our lives, for this day, this morning, and now that it had come

why must anyone say, "Time to get started?" Even I, who had sought to keep calm and cheerful, was now disconcerted. I had always liked Konon. His was the only orchard in the village I had never raided, because he was always generous with his fruit. Yet now he seemed brazen and ruthless. A demon, was he? Did not he know that he was to drive us away forever from the village, the home, the people and everything else that had of a sudden become precious and sanctified?

But Konon knew his duty. Pipe in mouth, whip under his arm, he picked up a huge sack and carried it out into the wagon. "Let's help him, neighbors," said Mother. Many hands reached out for other bundles. Sobs, wails, cries.

"Oh, beloved, why are you leaving us?"

"Oh, what a misfortune!"

"Forgive us if we ever offended you!"

Humility and grief fusing into a symphony of anguish.

Now I felt annoyed. We were going away, we might never return, but we were not going to die; why then talk and weep as though we were? Why transmute disconsolateness into a mood of doom? But the muzhiks could not restrain themselves, especially the women, and none so much as Shtshepa and Adarya. To them, of course, our departure was an especial loss, not only because they had been Mother's closest friends, but because their houses faced ours. Henceforth at night our windows would be dark. No smoke would be coming out of our chimney. And every time they looked out of their windows or stepped into the street, a black void would loom before them and a tomblike silence would dismay them. I meant to say something to Sergey, but his mother's grief had accentuated his moroseness, and he seemed in no mood for conversation.

"Get into the wagon," said Konon, a command which it was futile to disobey.

We walked out of the house, and the visitors, tumbling after us, surrounded the wagon and helped us into the seats of straw. Laying away his pipe and cautiously stepping on the hub of a front wheel so as not to soil his white trousers and his gray woolen coat, Konon hopped into the front and crouched down on his side by the dashboard. Lifting the lines, he exclaimed: *"Nyo, nyo!"*

(Giddap, giddap). The horses started at a walk. The mud was too deep for them to trot, and it was just as well they didn't. There was no need for haste. We had no reason to tear away with the speed of a bride and groom racing to church for their wedding. Minutes were precious; they would remain long-cherished memories. Yet Konon was a little impatient. *"Nyo, nyo!"* he muttered again with a touch of irritation. Presently the wagon splashed into a water hole that stretched the whole breadth of the street, and the crowd that followed us, like mourners accompanying a bier, lurched knee deep into the mud. On and on they walked, talking little, crying no more, now and then only someone uttering a sob, Mother more often than others.

We were actually leaving the place—there could be no question about it now. Konon could be depended upon to bring us to our destination, and he would return alone with the last word of news from us. And then . . .

I felt heavy, heavier than at any time since Mother had announced her decision to leave. Despite its miseries, the village had had its enchantments. The wood, the river, the pastures, the meadows, the berry bushes, the mushrooms, the orchards which I had raided were all a part of this enchantment, and never before had I realized it more poignantly. I was leaving home, and yet I had been made to feel and to believe that home was something from which one never parted, even as the tree never parts from the earth in which it has its being. Home was not only the place where one was born but where one's whole life unfolded; not only where one dreamed but where one wept; not only where one loved but where one hated; not only where one begot progeny but where one died. That was the way it had been with my father and my grandfather. Now there was to be a complete break with the old concept, the old usage, the old entrenchment. The native earth would claim me no more. Henceforth, however happy and opulent a life I might have in the New World, I should be without a home, and I should miss it and perhaps cherish the word all the more longingly.

An ancient home it had been, nurturing a civilization that had long ago died and been forgotten in other lands, that was someday to die, indeed be blown to shreds, here too, and that yet abounded

in a wisdom and a glamor all its own. True, it was shockingly primitive; even I, since my attendance at school, had begun to realize that. Not a person in the village had ever heard of a toothbrush. Not more than half a dozen of the grown boys and girls had discovered the handkerchief. The very word "underwear" was alien to all of them. They did not know what a privy was—and used the pigsty or the open fields. Only a handful of men could read and write; not a single older woman, except my mother. The great men of their own race—Pushkin, Tolstoy, Turgenev—might never have been born, for all they knew of them. A slice of white bread and a piece of sugar were luxuries to be coveted and sought after—sometimes, as when a boy or girl stole from their father a bosomful of grain with which to buy it, at the hazard of a violent beating.

And yet it had always spilled over with friendliness and humility. Its faith in the Evil One and in the *rusalka* was as stirring as its love of talk and song. Its isolation fed its pugnacity and nourished its good-fellowship. Its doors were always open to anyone who cared to lift the wooden latch, and its heart brimmed over with warmth. It wept inordinately, but its youth, especially the girls, laughed hilariously. It swore fiendishly, and it danced magnificently and always with a wild and boisterous rhythm. Its curiosity was immense, its enlightenment dismal. It was afire with passion, in love no less than in revenge. It loved life, and death it never feared. Its sole dread was the uniformed official and the evil spirit. In spite of its age, centuries of existence, it had hardly discovered itself, and even less, much less, had it discovered the world outside its doors.

Still I felt that I should miss it, even its slovenliness and its murk. I should especially miss Blind Sergey, the only man in the village who swore that the earth was round like a potato and not flat like a sleeping platform, and yet to whom the Evil One was an endless source of conflict and excitement and, I suspect, also of comfort. I should miss old Ahay with his ponderous manner and his fantastic tales of wolves and of *rusalkas* who were as real to him as he was to me. I should miss the beggars with their charming prevarications, their age-old lyres, their wondrous singing of ballads. I should miss all of this ancient humanity which had never suspected how ancient and moldered it was.

With my eyes I searched the houses we passed. I knew them all, and they appeared no different from what they had always been, log hovels, thatch roofs, black chimneys sticking out of the peaked roofs like bewitched little monsters and belching forth fitful balls of bluish smoke. Now and then I saw a pigeon on a roof, a crow taking to flight and to raucous cawing, a pig wallowing in mud, a dog rushing to the gateway, too bewildered by the sight of the procession to venture beyond or to do much barking. Outwardly everything was the same, yet inwardly all was different, as if spun over with a sanctity I had never sensed and a witchery I had never before beheld. I was in a penitent and forgiving mood.

On reaching the little chapel at the end of the village, people bowed and made the sign of the cross over their bodies, and Konon stopped the horses and turned round. He knew the procession would end here, and he would give us one more chance for farewell-taking.

"Don't forget us, for heaven's sake, don't."

"Write us happy letters."

"You were such good neighbors."

"Remember us to all America."

"You'll be happier there than we are here."

"Much happier."

"Of course, of course."

Floods of words mingling with floods of tears.

*"Nyo, nyo, nyo!"* shouted Konon at the horses as he drew the lines over them. Only Shtshepa followed along. With one hand over her bosom, as if to suppress her sorrow, and with the other clinging to the wagon, she walked when the horses walked and trotted when the horses trotted, unmindful of the lumps of mud that the wheels flung at her. When we got past the cemetery, she embraced us all once more and remained behind. For a while she stood watching us, and then she quickly turned off the road into a near-by potato field and hid between the vines.

Gray, brown, green were the fields ahead, and far away they merged into a wall of dark mist which was the landlord's forest.

Farewell forever!

PART TWO

# Arid Zones

CHAPTER IX

## *New York*

OFTEN I WONDER whether it was our village that discovered America or whether it was America that discovered our village! Either proposition can be argued with facility and vehemence, though neither is susceptible of mathematical proof. I have the feeling that the feverish energies of America, reaching out first for our bristles and our flax, had at least as much to do with it as the boisterous curiosity of our villagers.

At any rate, I had been in this country, or rather in New York, less than a week when the evidence in support of all the legends I had heard of America from beggars, gypsies, lumbermen, peddlers, merchants and other impassioned gatherers of news reached overwhelming proportions. Fat meat, for example. I am sure that Ivan the Fool, who in disgust, because of his ineligibility for admission, denounced every good word on America as a deliberate and malicious fraud, would have gasped with delight at a mere glance at the meat that I had for my first meal. Of course it was fat. The sight of the roast sputtering with hot grease stirred me to ecstasy. In the old home I had never had enough meat. No matter how heartily I had eaten I could always dispose of another helping of meat, especially if it was fatty. I readily ate the sausage of our neighbors, without Mother knowing it, of course, because of the little balls of fat that shone out of it like stars in a murky sky. Now fat meat was mine for the asking, and, what was more, I learned that it was cheaper than lean meat, a strange subversion of good taste, I thought. I hurried with my first helping so as to be sure I would be in time for another before it was all consumed.

Yet the thrill did not last long. Soon I not only wearied of fat meat, but I lost all appetite for it—it died as completely as our bonfires in the woods when a shower splashed down. I got so that on being asked whether I cared for the fat portion of a roast I

shook my head in fullhearted refusal. In the stern climate of the old village, where the mud alone sharpened the appetite, and where little of it was to be had, and where the amount of other fats was limited, fat meat was an aspiration and a boon. But in New York, with its mild weather and its abundance of fats in other foods, it became an ordeal. I should not have minded had there been a law banning its sale or even its use.

All that I had heard of sugar was true. If at home only lumbermen and merchants and landlords might allow themselves the luxury of sweetening their tea by dropping sugar into the glass, two and three or more lumps, here even I might do it without invoking a reprimand or even a look of disapproval from Mother or anyone else in the family. In fact here it was impossible to economize on sugar by nibbling at it as we did at home. There the sugar had a stern geologic quality. Many were the mouthfuls of hot tea that passed over it before it eroded into complete dissolution. If I held the piece that I hacked off with my teeth under the tongue, I might drink half a glass of tea before the taste of sweetness in my mouth was washed away. Here, whether I held the piece under or over the tongue, on mere contact with a mouthful of hot tea its cohesiveness collapsed as readily as the lump of half-dried mud with which, out of spite or revenge, I used to smite the back or the face of a playmate. Here it took less sugar to sweeten the tea in the glass than in the mouth. That was the kind of sugar America had, but there was lots of it, and it was cheap, and its use in the accepted form meant no special extravagance.

True also were the stories of white bread. At first I could not eat enough of it—sweet rolls, plain rolls, with cinnamon and poppy seeds, without cinnamon and poppy seeds; I ate them during meals and between meals. In walking the streets and seeing displays in bakeries or on pushcarts I often yielded to the temptation of indulging the appetite for them. Yet soon enough, as in the case of fat meat, I tired of white bread. Often I wished I could drop in on Boris the Cattle, as poor a man as there was in the village, ask him to cut me a slab of black bread, retire to a corner beside his huge brick oven and make a meal of it with a cucumber or with nothing more than garlic rubbed on the crusted part. Baked with grated potato instead of with yeast, which the village had not yet

discovered, and never fresh except on the day it came out of the oven, its very solidity and coarseness gave it a tang and a relish which the puffy and overrefined American bread never had. I was amazed at my sudden hunger for the black bread of the old days.

Magnificently true were the stories of handkerchiefs and shoes. Here even I had to have a handkerchief, and not only on the Sabbath and on holidays but on weekdays. The sleeve of the blouse or the bare hand might do well enough in the old village, but not in the streets or anywhere else in New York. A woman just could not stoop down and reach for the bottom of her dress, as she might do in the old village, every time she wanted to blow her nose. Nor did girls need to wait for marriage to flaunt a handkerchief before neighbors and make them aware of the good fortune that had come to them. A handkerchief was neither luxury nor adornment, nor badge of superiority, and one needed to be neither landlord nor merchant to be supplied with one at all times and for all emergencies.

And of course nobody walked barefooted nor in *lapti*—not even children, not in the street, anyway; nor did anybody clump about in thick-leathered knee-high boots; and, whatever the shoes that a man wore, he never bothered to soil his hands, the floor, his clothes, by applying grease to them and then wait for hours or overnight for it to soak into the leather and dry before again stepping into them. He got "a shine" while sitting in a comfortable chair, and when he descended to the sidewalk and looked at his shoes, his heart thumped with joy, for they gleamed like mirrors, and no one in the old home, neither the landlord nor the lumberman nor any of the officials in swanky uniforms, ever could make their boots glisten so brilliantly. Most true was the story of cigarette paper, too true. Nobody used wrapping paper, copybook paper, newspaper, for the rolling of cigarettes and, what was more, hardly anybody made his own, anyway. A man bought his cigarettes ready-made and in pretty boxes. Back home neither the landlord's sons nor daughters, when they went riding horseback and smoked, displayed such cigarettes or such pretty boxes.

Shockingly false, of course, was the story of the colors of American pants. True, people did not make them of white homespun or factory-woven linen, nor did they in their choice of fabrics

compete for color with buttercups, cornflowers, lilacs, as did our village landlords and their children in the trousers they sported when they went riding horseback. The dark gray of the home-woven woolen cloth, were it not so hot and heavy, would have won complete approval in America. Indeed, instead of talking so much about bright-colored pants, our folk in the old village might better have learned something of the glories of American underwear. Here was something to stir anyone's fancy. The mere contact of the garment with the body gave a man a feeling of gallantry. He could spread his legs, twist his limbs, crawl, climb, jump over beds, chairs, stand on his head, roll on the floor, and yet when he dashed before a mirror to look at himself the suit clung to him as trim and tight as the skin of an apple. Their ignorance of underwear would have made the story all the more exciting to the folk in the old home.

It was just as well, of course, that nobody had ever mumbled a word about bananas. Not only Ivan the Fool, but Blind Sergey as well, would have twisted his face in revulsion. He might have deemed the fruit excellent forage for the Evil One, or perhaps discovered in it the surest means of exorcising his presence from the community. Until the time that he had acquired a taste for it he would have thought it no more fit for human consumption than a green thistle. Subsequently he might regret the initial revulsion, but then Blind Sergey was no novice at subsequent regrets.

Our villagers might have heard a few words of other American achievements—of the little shiny bars of chocolate, for example, that beckoned to the pedestrian from endless pushcarts on the streets. Sold at a penny—that is, at two kopecks apiece—the poorest boy in the old village could have purchased one or several, at least on the eve of a holiday, for the girl whose hand he hoped to win. The gift would have evoked endless exclamations of gratitude and would have aided the suit more brilliantly than freshly picked cucumbers, or lumps of sugar. Had Anna been around, I should have loaded her hands with the shiny little bars. No doubt she would have treasured them so highly that she would have eaten then with black bread, perhaps only on Sundays and for dessert.

Our people might likewise have heard a few words of the soda fountains that gleamed majestically out of the open stalls and in

the candy shops and spouted the palate-pricking carbonated water into a large glass at a price no higher than that of a bar of chocolate on the pushcarts, or at twice that amount when seasoned with a lavish portion of rich and fragrant syrup. And why hadn't anyone ever mentioned the decorative and juice-soaked tomato? Not even the German landlord had yet begun to cultivate it, though it would have made a fit companion to the cucumber, because it could be eaten with bread and potato, made into soup and pickle, served with meat and herring, used as an appetizer after a gulp of vodka, munched as a delicacy in between meals and a special boon for the numerous fast days when neither milk nor meat foods nor eggs were permitted. It might even vie with the cucumber in its appeal to girls at a dance or any other gathering.

Had any of my old neighbors followed me around on my rambles in the streets and peered as I did into the shop windows, they would have been as excited as I was and as bewildered by the arrays of foods in cans, in boxes, in jars, in bottles, in packages, in bags, and by the ornate displays of footwear, clothes, haberdashery, hardware, musical instruments and a multitude of other commodities, of the names and uses of which they might have been as ignorant as I was They would have been as mystified too by the variety and multitude of tastes and appetites that man had acquired in this thunderous America, so many indeed that they would have wondered how people found the time to indulge the one or the other or even to think of them.

Perhaps, though, it was well that they had heard no more than they had. Out of sheer envy or incredulity they might have swung to the support of Ivan the Fool, who had proclaimed the existence of America an invention and a fraud. Besides, the more meager the information of those who came over, the more overwhelming would be their joy in the discovery of this fantastic material abundance. Only then, in the light of the opulence of America, could they envisage the real destitution of the old village, of the whole world out of which they had come. What destitution! No socks, no handkerchiefs, no underwear, seldom enough soap, generations behind the New World, and with no visible hope of putting itself in a position to reach out for the knowledge, the energy, the ambition to transform itself to anything similar. How

could it, steeped as it was in "the deep and horrible mud," as my mother would say, and all that it implied in daily living? It was hard enough to pull cows and horses and wagons and sometimes our own feet out of that black muck. To lift the whole scheme of living out of it would have required a power that was nowhere in sight, a power that could blow the mud off the face of the earth.

After I had been in New York a few weeks I went to work as errand boy in a shop. One of my duties was to buy lunches for the girls who worked there—that is, for those who did not bring theirs from home. Until I came, this chore had been performed by an Italian girl named Lina. Bright-eyed, with a mass of dark hair and wearing a loose and flaming red blouse and a dark skirt, she was one of the most cheerful girls I had ever known. She worked with her mother as a button sewer, and to my inexperienced eyes she was as dexterous with needle and thread as her mother, though her mother was so steeped in her work that she seldom looked up from the garment in her hands, while Lina, nimbly plying the needle and thread with her fingers, often enough swept the room with her brilliant and merry eyes. The moment anyone caught her glance she broke into a titter. Only about two years older than myself, her whole life seemed an endless flow of mirth.

The first day I was in the shop Lina taught me how to go about getting lunches for the girls. Paper and pencil in hand, she made the rounds of the girls and wrote down their orders. I envied her the ease and fluency with which she wrote English. Now and then, as she wrote down a word, she would say something to me, only to be answered by a look of bafflement, because I understood hardly a word of what she was saying. That gave her an excuse for an extra giggle. After she had written down all the orders she went with me to the lunch counter a few doors away from the shop. On our way she again tried to draw me into conversation, but I only shook my head and we both laughed. When the orders were filled we went back to the shop and, by means of nods, winks, gestures, Lina enabled me properly to distribute the packages

The next day I went around taking the orders without Lina's

help. I wrote down the words as I heard them and in Russian. At the lunch shop I read them off from my piece of paper, and the fat man at the counter opened a barrage of talk which was as meaningless to me as Lina's and infinitely more annoying. Snatching the paper from my hand, he scrutinized it closely, scowled, shrugged his shoulders and, after more incomprehensible talk, proceeded to do up the lunches anyway. I was glad Lina was not along while he was attempting to puzzle out my writing and to question me as to its contents. She would have screamed with laughter, and this time it might have been more than embarrassing. Still I had the orders filled, and that was a triumph, perhaps a miracle. On my return to the shop I distributed them as best I could. When the girls opened their packages they turned to each other with surprise and dismay and proceeded to exchange sandwiches, pies, cakes. Laughter, scowls, cries of protest, and Lina in a dither of excitement and, either out of politeness or in deference to her mother's admonition, heroically suppressing her mirth. I felt better when her mother called me over to her work table, gave me a piece of cake and mumbled in sympathy, "Goota boy, goota boy." Nothing my own mother could have said in that moment of confusion and pain would have been more heartening.

The next day Lina went about with me taking the orders and writing them down on paper. When I came back she helped me to distribute them to the proper girls. Hearing her repeat the orders and watching her write them down enabled me to pick up a substantial vocabulary. In less than a week I could go about and take orders by myself and write them down in English and only rarely get them so badly mixed that the girl who ordered a frankfurter without mustard received a corned-beef sandwich with mustard. Always, of course, Lina with her dancing eyes and her ineffaceable smile was beside me to rectify errors.

Meanwhile, having invested the first week's earnings in a Russian-English dictionary and in a Russian-English study book, I compelled myself every day to commit to memory at least twenty new words. It was fun to come to the shop and to try out my freshly acquired vocabulary on Lina. Patient and amiable, though utterly unable to control her laughter, she took pains to correct my errors, particularly in pronunciation. Her mother knew only

a few words of English and smiled with approval on her and on me and often nodded and muttered, "Goota boy, goota boy."

Once I was asked to come in and work on Sunday morning. On my arrival at the shop I found Lina and her mother also there. On finishing work at noon I heard them engage in a spirited dialogue in Italian. I knew it concerned me, because Lina's eyes and smile betrayed her. Then Lina informed me that her mother wanted me to come to their house for lunch. They lived on Mulberry Street, she said, and it would not be much out of my way home, and I didn't have to stay long if I didn't have the time.

Gladly I accepted the invitation and walked with Lina and her mother to Mulberry Street, which was about ten blocks from the shop. After climbing three flights of stairs in an old gas-lighted tenement house, with dark hallways, much darker than in the newer tenement in which I lived, we came to a rear apartment. Lina pounded on the door, and as we entered we were greeted by an explosion of joy which made me forget the dingy and gas-smelling hallways. I had thought that, what with the three boarders who lived with us, our four-room apartment was the very epitome of American overcrowding. Yet here was an Italian household with only three rooms and so many children that I could hardly count them. They seemed to tumble out of chairs, couches, out of the very walls. Nor had I ever known a more noisy or more hilarious family. The adults were only slightly less explosive in their merriment than were the children. The father, a short wiry man with massive shoulders, brilliant eyes, and a face that was a perpetual mask of smiles, greeted me with a prolonged and firm handshake and with a flow of Italian words which I didn't understand and which Lina, with the unsolicited help of her numerous brothers and sisters, hastened to translate for me. Though he had been in this country ten years he had learned only a few more words of English than his wife, but that in no way curbed his exuberant articulateness or his overflowing hospitality. Drawing me to a seat at the table, he passed candy and pastry and poured a glass of wine and bombarded me with questions. His curiosity was as boundless as his cheer. He might have been a peasant in my own old village for all the reserve he showed in his eagerness to learn everything

about our family. He was particularly pleased when I told him that my mother had given birth to eleven children, and even more hilarious when I told him that my father had had six more by his first wife. Not everything Lina translated was clear to me. Many of her words and expressions I failed to understand. But words were not as important as gestures, facial expressions, exclamations and, above all, the continuous and explosive roars of laughter. I never had known people who laughed with the energy and enthusiasm of these Italians. They seemed to be born to joy and laughter. I do not remember whether Lina had informed me how many children there were in her family, but I never can forget the thunderous outburst of mirth when her father asked her to tell me that he expected several more. Even the mother joined in the uproar that followed the announcement. Nor did the good man fail to convey to me his hope that when I grew up and got married I should be at least as fecund as my father. When I left and reached the street, I seemed to be billowed along by endless waves of laughter. I wished that people in my part of the city had been as explosively jovial as were Lina and her family.

Shortly afterwards "slack" had set in. Though it was a new word to me, it did not take me long to learn its harrowing meaning. Girl after girl was laid off. Expressmen ceased coming up with cases and rolls of cloth. Fewer and fewer messenger boys called with packages. Finally all the "operators" were told not to come any more. The engine was at a standstill, and so were the machines, and the quiet was at first deafening. Lina and her mother were still needed to sew buttons on the heaps of remaining garments. I too was needed to sweep the floor, fold the garments, pack them into boxes and carry them to the express office. With Lina and her mother around, the shop still had glamor. But soon there were no more garments on which to sew buttons, and Lina and her mother were laid off until the "new season," which might begin in two months and might not start in less than four.

Deserted by my best friends, the shop had lost all brightness and all appeal. It had assumed an air of dismal foreboding. The silent engines and the silent machines were dumb reminders of former struggle and hope. The boss, a huge, phlegmatic man with a bald

head and staring eyes, never showed up until midday. He stayed long enough to read his mail, send me down for a corned-beef sandwich and coffee for his lunch and have a few words with the foreman. Only the foreman and I came as usual at an early hour in the morning. A little man with a pinched face and a squeaky voice, the foreman fawned on the boss in the manner of a man who has lost all vestige of self-respect. No muzhik in the old village ever had abased himself so deliberately in the presence of a landlord or a uniformed official as he did before the boss. In mortal dread of losing his job and the wherewithal to support his wife and four children, he resorted to one form of servility after another so as to keep in the good graces of the man on whom the job depended. I wished Lina were around so that I could tell her in my broken English how much I loathed the pathetic little man. But she was gone now. I missed her dancing eyes and her irrepressible laughter, and I missed no less her mother's kindly face and the still more kindly whisper of "Goota boy, goota boy." I felt lonely and forsaken. Soon I too was needed no longer and was dismissed.

Not yet fifteen years of age, I felt deeply the meaning of unemployment in a city. I had been earning only three dollars a week, a small enough sum, but an important item to Mother in her weekly budget. Only by pooling our earnings together, and with her in charge of the housekeeping, could we have the meat and the butter and the other foods that we ate, and of which I had eloquently boasted in letters to former schoolmates in Russia. Mother was urging me to find another job. I tried hard enough. I walked from shop to shop, store to store, one druggist's establishment to another, but no one needed an errand boy whose English was as deficient as mine. I couldn't help wondering what would have happened to me, even if I were grown up, had I been all alone in New York.

In the old village our garden, our few strips of land, our cow, our hens were a guarantee against absolute destitution. Besides, there always was a neighbor who would lend us, or any other family in need, a sack of rye or potatoes until the next harvest was gathered. Even Boris the Cattle or Trofim the Hawk would gladly lend a loaf of bread to a person or a family in want. Poor and

backward as we all were, we never starved. In our worst days we never went to bed without the assurance of soup, potatoes and bread for breakfast the next morning. In our simple and primitive economy, unemployment did not matter. Indeed, we hardly knew the meaning of the word. It certainly was no calamity. In winter men loafed most of the time because there was little work for them on the farm. Nor were they overeager to make work for themselves. But they did not suffer from lack of bread, not even in years of a bad harvest. Here, in the moneyed economy of the modern city, his job was all a man had to lean on for his bread. What should I have done without a job? It was well enough to talk of the munificent sums a man could earn in America, all in dollars, and of the multitude of things he could buy at low prices in shops and from pushcarts. But if he lost his job and couldn't find another, no matter how assiduously he searched, what would he do? I dreaded the thought of ever finding myself in such a predicament. True, I was living with a family, but even so, in the moneyed economy of New York and with the low wages my brothers and sisters were receiving, every nickel counted, and every one of us had to earn his own living. The glamor of the American dollar, of which I had heard so much in the old village, vanished, had indeed turned into an evil omen. No, I should never want to be a shopworker, like my older brother and all my sisters. The devil with work in any shop, except as a temporary respite. If only because of the guarantee against destitution which it afforded, I should someday go back to the land. There man never could be as tragically helpless as in the city, with the job in a shop as a sole way of earning a living.

Meanwhile I needed New York, to learn the language and to find my bearings in this stirring new world in which I was to spend the rest of my life.

## CHAPTER X

## *Quest for the American Village*

EVERY EVENING I SPENT HOURS with my Russian-English dictionary and my Russian-English study book. As soon as I added a few

new words to my vocabulary, I hastened to try them on the native-born boys I had met, usually with no end of amusement to them and with no little grief to myself.

Then I entered night school. Nearly all the students were adults, some in their middle age. Working people nearly all of them, after a day's labor in the shop school obviously was too much of a tax on their depleted energies.

In consequence many of them dozed off during the lessons, and then—much to the dismay of the teacher, who to retain his job sought to hold the class together with gymnastic exercises and all manner of promises—one by one they stopped coming. When only a handful of us remained, we were merged with another class. That did not improve our diligence. Students continued to doze off during the lessons and, when called upon to recite or to write a sentence on the blackboard, they wakened with a start, blinked in confusion at the teacher and at the class and remained silent.

I wondered why young boys like myself had to be put in the same classes with grownups, who worked much harder than we did and therefore had less energy and less eagerness for study. I could learn more by poring over my books at home and playing around with the boys I had met on the block or on the roof of our house than in night school, and so I too quit going to classes.

Then I discovered East Broadway. I know of no street in the world which at that time teemed so tempestuously with movements, ideals, ideologies as did this broad and humble thoroughfare in the heart of New York's East Side. Here were Anarchists, Social Revolutionaries, Social Democrats, Social Populists, Zionists, Zangwillites, Assimilationists, Internationalists, Single Taxers, Republicans, Democrats, each group with its own gods, dead and alive, its own demons too, dead and alive, its own headquarters, its own press, its own lectures and debates and its own impassioned resolve to save something or somebody, the working peoples of America, the working peoples of the world, the Russian muzhiks, the Russian proletariat, all the Russian people, the Jews of America, the Jews of the world, the American farmer, the American proletariat, all the American people, all the immigrant peoples. I never had realized that there were so many different ways of achieving salvation or that there were so many people, indeed

masses of them, passionately engrossed in bringing it to somebody except to themselves. And lurking in quiet places, in basements, on stoops of houses was another set of crusaders, well-dressed, well-groomed, soft-spoken, always affable and smiling, and they were seeking to save everybody, but especially the immigrant Jews, for Jesus!

It all sounded new and exciting. Earnestly I began to listen to these gospels of hope and deliverance, and the more I listened the more excited and confused I was. I was confronted by a Babel of intellectual tongues, all equally impassioned, equally logical, equally confident of triumph, and equally horrified at the thought of the triumph of the opposition. I was soaking up ideology, all manner of ideology, by the bucketful, and I began to ask myself a multitude of questions which had never before entered my mind. Life had begun to expand. I was becoming aware of ideas and forces outside of myself, of the street on which I lived, of the shop in which I worked, of whose existence and of whose power for good and evil I never had known.

Yet in my boyish naïveté I wondered why these learned folk, who were bursting with ideas, enthusiasm and a spirit of self-sacrifice that often wrung the heart, were so hopelessly divided among themselves Why did the Anarchists hate the Socialists so vitriolically, and the Socialists the Zionists, and the Nationalists the Internationalists, and the Social Revolutionaries the Social Democrats, and the Single Taxers the Republicans and the Democrats? Love for the ideal fused with a scorching hatred for the opponent. If the crisis in the world was so overwhelming that all mankind, including all of East Broadway, was threatened with collapse and devastation, why didn't these leaders and spokesmen of the new worlds of promise for once sink their differences and pool their wisdom and their energies and hold mankind from the imminent plunge into chaos and ruin? Young as I was, the idea of consecrating oneself to a cause appealed to me. There was excitement and grandeur in a crusade for salvation. The question that tormented me was—which cause to espouse? I shifted from one to another, but none was so foolproof that an older person in a debate with me couldn't demolish, one by one, every tenet that I sought to defend. I gave up in despair. If the prophets of the various

causes and their disciples were not wise or strong enough so to fortify their ideological positions that opponents couldn't demolish them, who was I to uphold the beliefs and the aspirations of any of them? I decided that I was neither clever enough nor old and impassioned enough to be a crusader for any abstract ideal.

To this day I wonder why it is that, in a time of crisis, instead of uniting and jointly attacking the common enemy, intellectuals and radicals the world over, unlike reactionaries, persist in fighting and annihilating each other. Witness the bloody internecine feuds in the Christian Revolution, the French Revolution, the Russian Revolution, and even in the budding Spanish Revolution.

It was no use seeking an answer to my perplexing questions. There just was not any. I therefore ceased going to meetings, lectures, debates, and I could no longer be dragged to the cafés where the "gods" gathered and continued their hot feuds to the impassioned delight of their adoring followers.

One evening, in walking along Madison Street, I passed a small, brightly lighted building on the outside of which was an announcement of a lecture on Herbert Spencer by a man named Edward King. The name of Herbert Spencer was new to me, and so was that of the lecturer. I decided to go in. If the man was a good lecturer it would help my English. I slid into a seat in the rear and was surprised at the smallness of the room and of the audience. It was more like a class than a public lecture. The students were all adults and included several women. Not one of the men was in knee pants like myself, which made me a little anxious lest I might be thought an intruder and asked to leave. But no one seemed to be aware of my presence. On a small platform beside a stand piled with books, some of them open, stood a short stocky man with a rolling abdomen and a lofty forehead. He wore glasses, and his eyes were overhung by brows as massive and gray as his mustache. He spoke with a fluency and a fervor that held his audience entranced. So many were the learned words he used that I understood only a small part of what he was saying. Yet I too found myself immersed in the lecture. The warmth of the man, the melodiousness of his voice, the magnificence of his diction stirred me. Sweat shone on his brow, and he frequently

wiped it with a handkerchief. On and on he spoke, earnestly, thoughtfully, and neither he nor his audience showed the least fatigue. The thrill of hearing him was all the greater because of my identification of words that I had learned from the dictionary and my study book, but that I had never used and never had heard anyone else use.

When the lecture was finished, the audience gathered around the lecturer and plied him with questions, and the answers constituted another lecture, or rather a series of lectures, for they dealt with a multitude of subjects, some of which had no connection with Herbert Spencer. From their accents alone I could tell that these people were immigrants and, like the lecturer himself but unlike the idealists and the crusaders that I had heard, they were infinitely more concerned with knowledge than with salvation. At any rate, here were no heated arguments and vituperative denunciations of "the enemy," whose scheme of salvation was supposed to plunge all mankind into darkness and woe. They were shopworkers and small businessmen with an uncommon amount of intellectual curiosity.

A little self-conscious, not only because a good part of the conversation was beyond my comprehension but because I was wearing knee pants, I stayed on and listened to the discussion. When the crowd had thinned, the lecturer noticed me—a fresh face—and, reaching out his hand, he greeted me with a hearty handshake and a word of welcome. Then I knew that, so far as he was concerned, my knee pants did not matter. I asked if he had any objection to my coming regularly to his series of lectures on philosophy, and he said no. He asked me a few questions about myself, and I told him that my most pressing task at the moment was to find a job and to master the English language. Forgetting philosophy, he proceeded to offer advice on how best to learn English. Instead of merely memorizing words out of a dictionary and a study book, he suggested that I start reading a book, preferably a novel, because it might be easier to understand and more interesting to follow. Words that I did not know I was to write down on a sheet of paper, and after I had finished reading a page I was to look them up in the dictionary, write out their definitions and memorize them. Then I was to reread the page, and if I understood every word I was to

go on in the same way with the next page and the next until I finished the book. "But be sure," he warned me, "that you get an interesting book. If you come here next week I'll bring you a book."

Of course I came next week earlier than anybody else, and when he saw me he said, "I have a book for you," and he gave me a secondhand copy of George Eliot's *Adam Bede*. I followed his advice, and to my immense joy my knowledge of the language grew rapidly.

Subsequently I learned something of the history of this singularly learned and lovable man. A Scotsman with a passion for philosophy and an outstanding exponent of positivism, he had settled many years earlier on the East Side and had educated several generations of immigrants. Some of his former pupils and followers, on attaining literary and professional eminence, had raised a modest fund with which to enable him to continue educating fresh groups. He lived in a small apartment on the lower East Side, and his place was a museum of secondhand books. He spent days wandering around old bookshops and buying books that appealed to him even though he knew he should never find the time to read them. They cluttered his rooms and hallways, and when a pupil called he loved to point to them and to talk endlessly of the joy he had in collecting them. His whole life centered in his books, his lectures, his pupils.

I found another job as errand boy in a garment shop, and now my time was divided between work, study, play with the boys on the block, and the weekly lectures of Edward King. I was busy, but I was not happy. I was growing continually aware of an irrepressible conflict between myself and the world about me. If the things that New York displayed to the physical eye, the wonders of the machine age, thrilled, the things that New York was, the New York in which I lived, saddened and dismayed. True enough, I had come from a primitive village where after a rain we were sunk in mud. But our mud did not smell except of dampness. It might give a man heartache but no headache. Yet in the street on which I lived and in the neighboring streets the piles of garbage reeked to heaven and did give me headaches. Why was

there so much garbage in the streets? Day and night the piles kept thundering out of stoops and windows. No sooner were the streets cleaned than fresh heaps like foul sores on a diseased body dotted the pavements. Nor were there fields near by and a landlord's forest, as in the old village, to which I might escape.

Of course there was the East River. I discovered it a few days after my arrival. The waterfront was only a few blocks away from the tenement in which I lived, and I often went there for a walk. It was more refreshing to walk there than in any other part of the neighborhood. Yet to me it was no river, not what I had come to regard as a river. Blind Sergey would have yelled his head off that no water nymph would ever want to make her home there. The ferries, tugs, barges and other craft and the smoke that came out of them, which dulled the very shimmer of the waters, would frighten her into flight. Deep enough to swallow many rivers like the one in the old home, it had neither the smell nor the melody of the latter nor its transcendent intimacy and mysteriousness. It might wash away the dirt and sweat of the city, but of the murk which hung over its waters it could not cleanse itself. The very grass on its banks in our neighborhood was entombed in steel and timber. Only after dark, with a breeze blowing off its surface and with the twinkle of the multicolored lights from docks, boats, buildings, did it assume an extraordinary wizardry, and it was more cheering to watch it in the evening than by daylight.

Then I discovered a park with plots of grass and trees, though nothing so luxuriant as the meadows and the birch forests in the old village. Yet every patch of green was stuck with a sign, "Keep Off the Grass." I boiled with indignation. What was a park for if people couldn't sit or lie on the grass in open sunlight or in the shade of a tree? Hot with protest, I jumped over the fence and stretched out full length and gazed at the river ahead. I had lain there only a few minutes when I heard a gruff voice shouting at me. Turning, I saw a man, in a brown outfit and a huge black hat that was more like a basket, scowling and gesturing and keeping up a flow of angry talk. What did I mean by lying down on the grass? Who in hell did I think I was anyway, and didn't I see the signs, "Keep off the grass?" Quickly I arose, jumped back to the cement walk and planted myself in a seat on a bench. The man

did not go away. Perhaps my silence only aggravated his displeasure. He glowered with scorn and then, muttering sullenly, "Greenhorn!" he walked off. Again I asked myself, what and whom was the park for, anyway? Back in the old village not even the landlord begrudged anyone the privilege of stretching out on the grass under a birch tree in his forest. And here I could not get near a tree or grass to smell of it without inviting castigation! (That, of course, was before the days of Robert Moses and the humanization of the city parks.) Perhaps I was expecting too much of New York. But I had come from a country of grass and trees and a river abounding in water nymphs, and I yearned for an escape from the tenements, the asphalt, above all from the insufferable piles of garbage, and there was no escape.

What irked me especially was a growing sense of isolation. In spite of the crowds in the street, the ever-increasing number of boarders in our apartment to make up for the unemployment of some members of the family, in spite of the numerous friends I had made on the block, I felt cut off from the outside world, the American world, almost as completely as was our village in spring when the floods and the mud made the roads impassable. I was overcome with a boundless wish to know something of this world, touch it in person, see it, hear it, feel it, eat with it, talk with it, laugh with it, sing with it and, if it was anything like the old village emotionally, mourn and weep with it. But I did not even know where to look for it. I knew it existed, a vast simmering, mysterious world, having a civilization all its own and stretching beyond New York to the Pacific Ocean, and here was I cooped up in the tenement section of the lower East Side, with not a glimmer of a chance to make its acquaintance, with hardly anyone ever speaking of it or caring for its existence.

Of course I had heard people talk of uptown. But uptown was only an extension of downtown. True, rich people lived there. The bosses, the landlords, the policemen made their homes there. No piles of garbage cluttered the streets uptown, and people there were well dressed, some of them carried canes, and everybody spoke English. Perhaps that was where real America began. I wondered and wondered. But uptown was forbidding. I might freely walk the streets there, look into windows of shops and homes,

watch the endless crowds saunter up and down the avenues, and that was all. There was no way I might participate in the life there and come to know people in their intimate setting, as friends, as members of a family, as plain human beings. I could learn of them no more than what I might see with my physical eyes. Then something happened that made the very word "uptown" anathema.

I discovered the Educational Alliance, and I often went there to spend my leisure in the library reading room. I had never seen so many shelves of books in any one place, and I loved to take an armful of them, sit at the table and turn the pages. One evening a new librarian came to work there. She was a slender, gray-haired lady with tight lips and exquisitely dressed. When she saw me bring an armful of books to the table, she came over and asked why I took so many books at once. In my imperfect English I explained that I loved to look at them, turn the pages, examine illustrations and read isolated passages. After watching me in indecision for a few minutes, she went back to her desk. I didn't like her sullen look and hoped she would never again come near me. Presently she was back by my side. "Sit up straight, please," she ordered. Startled, I looked at her with protesting eyes. I had not been aware how I was sitting, and now that she had made me conscious of it, I wondered what difference it made to her. However, with no word of rejoinder I obeyed. She went away, and while playing with the books I soon forgot myself and again leaned my head on my elbow. In an instant she was back at my side. "I told you to sit up straight." This time I refused to obey. I continued to turn the pages and refrained from looking at her. Again she repeated her order in a louder voice, and the boys and girls at my table looked up as if expecting trouble.

"I like it better this way," I finally growled.

"You've got to sit up straight," she ordered stiffly.

Was I tearing up the books? No. Was I breaking or scratching up the table? No. Was I calling her names? No. Why then did she demand that I sit in a position which I disliked? Incensed with her arbitrariness, I shoved the books off the table to the floor and dashed out of the room. Now I knew that the things I had heard about people uptown were true. Haughty and domineering, they didn't like the poor people downtown, and their attendant in a

library reading room wouldn't even permit an immigrant boy to sit in comfort. I pronounced an ugly curse on her and hoped I should never again cross her path. To make sure of it, I never went back to that reading room, and I decided that uptown was not real America, anyway.

Soon afterwards a model came to work in the shop in which I had found a new job. Every morning when I cleaned the showroom—wiped the furniture, the racks, the mirrors—she would be there, and now and then she asked me to hang up coats which she had been exhibiting the evening before. Tall, blue-eyed, with blonde hair, she spoke in a soft voice and with an intonation that was markedly different from that which I had been hearing downtown—that is, in the section in which I lived. Whenever she asked me to do something she thanked me and smiled, not the brittle thin-lipped smile of the librarian in the Educational Alliance but the amiable smile of a person who liked people and wanted them to like her. Again and again I wished I had the courage to tell her that she was the most beautiful girl I had ever known. She too came from uptown, and I wondered what manner of person she was outside of the shop. Was she reading Herbert Spencer and George Eliot and going to lectures like those Edward King was delivering? She was not as approachable as Lina, and I would never think of trying out my newly acquired words on her as I did on Lina, but it was exhilarating to watch her move gracefully about the showroom and to hear her speak and laugh as she and a buyer bantered each other.

Now I knew that there were beautiful women uptown, and not only beautiful but gracious and kind.

I had been in the country about a year when I felt that I knew English well enough to enter high school. Some of the boys in the neighborhood counseled me to enroll in the school which they were attending, the Stuyvesant High School. A new term was about to begin, and I went to see the principal.

His name was Dr Frank Rollins, and as I sat in the reception room waiting my turn to see him I felt anxious and agitated. To me the principal of an American high school was like the direc-

tor of a Russian Gymnasium, a man of eminence and with a forbidding dignity. I therefore wondered if Dr Rollins would grant my petition. I had not attended grammar school in this country, and technically I was not qualified for admission to high school without an examination, though the school from which I had graduated in Russia embraced a curriculum that was scholastically about the same as that of an American grammar school The chief difference was that I had studied Russian instead of American history. I was prepared to take the examination but feared I might not pass it. In that event would "the mister director" enroll me as a trial student? In Russia he would not, but then—this was not Russia. I prayed that in the presence of the man I might not feel so agitated and confused that I would slip up in my English, which of course would at once disqualify me for admission.

I trembled all over as I went into Dr Rollins' private office. As soon as I entered he greeted me amiably and pointed to a seat beside his own. The unexpected friendly greeting set me immediately at ease. A handsome, athletic man of about fifty, with dark hair, an expressive face and a broad smile, there was nothing in Dr Rollins' appearance or manner that suggested the director of a Gymnasium. No ornate uniform, no social stiffness, no superimposed dignity. In no way did he make me feel that he was an official. He might have been my uncle whom I was seeing for the first time in my life, so unassuming and comradely was his manner. He asked me a number of questions about myself and my life in a Russian village and about the schooling I had had in Russia. He seemed so keenly interested in my answers that he made no effort to bring the conversation to a hasty end, though I knew that many other callers were waiting in the reception room. Then, passing a sheet of paper to me and vacating his own chair so that I could sit at his desk, he asked me to write out a few of the things I had been telling him so that he could judge whether or not my written English was good enough to enable me to pursue my studies. Encouraged by his friendliness, I quickly filled the paper with writing and showed it to him. He seemed pleased and made out an admission card and told me to come the following Monday, when the new term would start. Before I left he asked if I had already de-

cided on the profession for which I wished to prepare myself, and without an instant's hesitation I replied, "I hope to be a farmer." He laughed a little, not, I am sure, in disapproval, probably only in surprise that a student in a city high school, especially in New York, should choose farming as a career. On leaving he shook my hand and asked me to come in and see him after I had attended classes for a few weeks and tell him how I liked the American school.

My head swam with triumph. I was actually admitted to an American Gymnasium, and it was all so easy; no questions about the financial and social status of the family, no lengthy application blanks to fill out, no need to pay any tuition fees or even to buy books, and "the mister director" such an amiable and fatherly man! Here was something exciting to write about to floundering schoolmates in far-away Russia.

The students in the school came from all the boroughs of the city, and here for the first time I was beginning to rub shoulders with boys who obviously belonged to *the* America that lay culturally if not geographically somewhere beyond uptown. They wore better clothes than I did, and they were much more articulate and boisterous. They seemed completely attuned to the school and all its activities, while I with my burden of uncertainties felt out of harmony with the spirit of the place. I watched my schoolmates with curiosity and envy.

At first I thought that they were an extravagant horde of young barbarians. They ate a prodigious amount of sweets, cakes, pies, chocolates and other candies, and the sandwiches that they brought from home for their lunches were wrapped in spotlessly white tissue paper, each sandwich in a separate sheet. On removing the paper from the food, they rolled it together and flung it at each other or into the wastebasket. Every day the wastebaskets were stuffed with endless sheets of soft paper which would have been a luxury of luxuries to the smokers in the old village. As poor a man as Trofim the Hawk would gladly have exchanged a freshly laid egg for a bundle of the precious sheets that were to be hauled off with the garbage. Had I not been abashed, I should have gathered them in a bundle and taken them home, though what I should have done

with it I knew neither then nor now. If the old village were within reaching distance I might have sent it there, and even the women who never smoked would have acclaimed it with joy.

The family finances were so low that, unless I made my contribution to the budget, I could not attend school. Luckily I found a job as errand boy and shipping clerk in a shop that needed my services only afternoons. I was glad of the job, and yet wished I could do without it so that I could participate in or at least witness some of the extracurricular activities. The whole world of athletics had been a closed book to me. From the moment I entered school I knew that basketball, baseball, football, track, were as essential and even more eloquent a part of school life than were books and classes. The lusty cheering practices were abundant testimony to the excitement of the students over athletic games. I understood neither the aims nor the intoxication of that frenzied and rhythmic yelling. Try as I might, I could not make myself a part of it. It just was not in me, and because I was occupied in the shop every afternoon, I could not burn with the fires of devotion which seemed to scorch the very benches on which the other students sat. I envied them, and yet their impassioned ra-ra-ra's gave me unending amusement. Here was something of real America of which neither beggars nor Blind Sergey had ever dreamed.

Meanwhile the work, the study, the crowded condition of our apartment, the incessant wrangles with two brothers who objected to my keeping on the gaslight in the kitchen—in which I prepared my homework and in which the three of us slept—later than their bedtime had shattered my health. I went to see Dr Rollins, and he sent me to a clinic. Then began a series of medical examinations and pronouncements which only preyed on my mind and further devastated my health. Nerve-racked and angry at the whole world, I lost interest in school, in work, in play, and I loathed the sight of a thermometer, a stethoscope or any other medical paraphernalia.

Often I wished I were back in the old village. In spite of its mud, its miseries, its idiocies, there were trees and grass there and immense fields over which I could wander and on which I could

shake off physical aches and languors and the bitterness of my soul.

Then, one day as I was on my way home from the clinic, an inner voice whispered, "Why don't you go to an American village?" Why not, indeed? The more I thought of it the more hopeful and excited I became. Eventually I was hoping to leave New York anyway. I was only waiting until I had completed my course in high school. I had set my mind and heart on an agricultural career—through college and to a farm of my own. I had two more years of high school. But then this was not Russia. I should find a high school in an American village, and I could continue my studies and go to college there, and meanwhile I should be striking roots in the American soil. More, I should be living in real America, not uptown, but 'way beyond, in the America that had intrigued and mystified and beckoned to me, but which I had neither seen nor felt nor absorbed. There would not only be trees and brooks and meadows and a real river there, but people like Blind Sergey and Amelko the Screamer—like them and yet different, of course, because after all this was America, and its monumental energy alone stirred an inner vigor and lushness which the old village with its age-old inertia and lethargy never could bring into being. I could work in this village. I was not bedridden, though I might be if I remained in New York and kept pounding my way from one clinic to another. A hoe, a scythe, a plow would take the place of the tonics, the cathartics, the emetics and all the other pharmacopoeia with which I had been drenching myself, and if, because of the weakened condition of heart, lungs, nerves, I were to die, I should at least take leave of the world with my eyes not on an ugly tenement wall and a pile of garbage but on a meadow, an orchard, a stream. Back to the village, to an American village, became the slogan, the hope, the passion of my life.

PART THREE

# Pine

## CHAPTER XI

## *Mount Brookville*

WHERE WAS I TO FIND the American village? I had never been outside of the city—that is, no farther than Brooklyn and Mount Vernon, where I had once gone on a school excursion. I had never met people who had lived in an American village or who had friends and acquaintances there or who could offer a single word of information on the subject. It was astounding how completely isolated my New York was from the American country, with not a smell or breath of it permeating the life of the people or making them even distantly aware of its existence.

Once I saw an Irish truckman back his team to the doors of a hallway in a shop building. The Irish, I thought, if only because they spoke English better than other immigrants, knew more about America than anyone else, and I decided to turn to the truckman for information. Sweat pouring down his flushed face, he was so eager to unload the huge cases on his truck that when I approached him he yelled at me to get the hell out of the way. I did quickly enough. Then I thought of seeking enlightenment from a policeman. On my arrival I had sought to avoid contact with these guardians of the law. I could not help thinking of them with a little dread, for I still had vivid memories of the officials I had known in the old home and of the disrespect in which they had been held and of the awe that they always aroused. But one rainy afternoon, as I was sauntering along a deserted business street, a policeman in a raincoat asked me to go into a corner saloon, which he pointed out to me, and tell the bartender to fetch into the hallway "a drink of whisky for the cop." I not only went to the saloon but was entrusted with the drink and, motioning to the policeman to come over, I gave it to him. After gulping it down

he thanked me, and ever since then my dread of men in uniform has been lessened, though it has never quite disappeared.

I therefore felt free to approach a policeman. The man I addressed said he was living in Jamaica, which was quite a town and no village at all. His parting counsel was for me to go out to Long Island and New Jersey and look around. But I was interested neither in Long Island nor in New Jersey, because they were close to New York. I sought a village that was far away from the big city, deep in the heart of the American country, with a life and a civilization that had not even a smell of asphalt or a shadow of a tenement. I scanned the want-ad columns of the now defunct New Work *World,* but I found in them neither guidance nor consolation. The few advertisements for farm help that I read were from Long Island and New Jersey farmers who were searching for experienced poultrymen, dairymen, teamsters, gardeners, and I was none of these.

Meanwhile I had said nothing to Mother or to anyone else in the family of my plans. I knew that if I had they would argue and discourage me and seek to prove to me that New York doctors, the best in the country, would eventually restore my health and that I could finish high school and go to college and become a doctor or a lawyer and move uptown and be somebody in this new world in which we were living—a prospect that appealed neither to my disposition nor to my imagination. I had come to regard with repugnance the fame of the doctor and the lawyer on the East Side, and the feverish rush of youth to become one or the other. Nor was it any longer a question of regaining my health. It was much more far-reaching. It was a question of retrieving something which New York had blasted out of me and which I felt I needed as desperately as good health. I would flee from the city without anyone in the family or among my friends knowing of it, until I had found my village and settled there and was beyond reach of expostulation and persuasion.

One day as I was wandering along the Bowery I felt a sudden bump on my head and a chilly splash over my face and hands. In my absent-mindedness I had crashed into a burly laborer and spilled the pitcher of beer he was carrying.

"Why in the devil don't you look where you're goin'?" he shouted, glowering at me with angry eyes. Several passers-by stopped, probably expecting a fight. But, noting my expression of dismay and repentance, the big fellow relented and proposed that I pay for a fresh pitcher of beer and he "would call it square." I assented to the compromise.

He led me to a basement saloon around the corner, and there, amidst gulps of beer, he grew chummy and talkative and asked where I was from and what I was doing. I told him I was searching for a job on a farm some place far from New York. He stared at me with surprise and commiseration.

"Did you ever work on a farm, fellow?" he asked, in the voice of man seeking to save a fellow mortal from impending doom. "Take my advice and don't," he went on with vigor, "ask an ol'-timer like me about that kind of a job. I came from a farm 'way up in Michigan. I've been away from the damned place seven years, and I ain't got the cow smell out o' my system yet. I want to tell you, young fellow, you've got as much fun workin' on a farm as a rat in a trap. There ain't enough money in the whole state of Michigan to get me back to the sod."

I knew all about cows and cow smells and only laughed at the warnings. "What's worrying me," I said, "is how to get the kind of a job I want"

"That needn't worry you, fellow. There's more jobs on farms than there's fools that wants them. If you was in my home town in Michigan lots of folks would grab you quick. Go up and see the Dutchman of the Star Employment Agency, right up the Bowery, a couple o' blocks from here. He'll fix you up fine. He's always gettin' me jobs, a damn nice fellow."

It was worth a bump on the head and the price of half a dozen glasses of beer to stumble on this precious information. Why hadn't I thought of an employment agency? I just hadn't. I bade my chance acquaintance good-by and hurried to the address he gave me. A crowd of men, youths mostly, had gathered at the entrance of the building, intently scanning the double row of hand-printed pasteboard cards that hung on top of one another, announcing various jobs that were to be filled. I joined the crowd,

and as my eyes darted from sign to sign they rested on one which read:

FARMHAND WANTED UPSTATE
$15 a month and good home.

I read and reread the sign with mounting hope. It might have been hung out for my benefit. What luck! Forgetting the doctor's orders never to be in a hurry climbing a stairway, I bounded up the two flights of creaking wooden stairs to the office of the agency and took my position in the long line of applicants. At last, with a feeling of misgiving lest the place I was seeking had already been filled, I swung into the cubicle at the end of the room which sheltered the manager. A little fellow, bowlegged, fat and sweaty, with a bald head shiny as glass, and with one of those expressionless faces that might reflect dumbness or conceal shrewdness, he bade me sit down and asked in a thick German accent what he could do for me. I told him I wanted *the* job on a farm upstate.

"Got lots of jobs on farms," he replied almost mechanically as he rolled a cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other. Eyeing me sharply, he began to put questions to me. Had I ever worked on a farm? Where, in Rooshia? Ach, Rooshians made goot farmhands, he'd seen dem on his fader's estate in Prussia How old was I—eighteen? Was I really eighteen? (I was lying, I was not yet seventeen, but I insisted I was eighteen.) Was I strong, very strong? Could I drive horses? Could I milk?

Could I milk! I stared for a moment, wondering if I had really heard the question. I, a man, to milk! Never had I heard of anything so shocking and so amusing. My father never milked, my brothers never milked. Blind Sergey never milked. Never had I known a man who had got down on his knees and jerked the milk out of a cow's udders. In the old home Mother or one of my sisters did the milking. Could I milk! He might as well have asked me whether I could spin flax, weave linen, dress a chicken. I was not offended; I was amused and perplexed. Yet I realized the need of a prompt and proper answer. Too much was at stake, perhaps everything, and so I replied that I was sure I could milk cows, and at any rate I had not the least objection to doing the chore. He thought for a moment, eyed me sharply and finally, taking the

cigar out of his mouth and loudly smacking his lips, he bent over a sheet of paper and said:

"If I sent you to a real goot place vill you shtay all summer?"

"And all winter."

"Sure you von't come back to take your girl to Coney Island?"

"I have no girl."

"Oh? Dot's goot. Girls in de country are nicer dan in der city, I tell you. A dollar and a half, please,"—my 10-per cent commission on my first month's wages.

He made out a receipt, wrote the address of the man to whom he was sending me, and gave me both. I read the address:

*Mr James Hoyt, Mount Brookville, New York.*

"D'you know the man, this Mr Hoyt?" I asked.

"No, I nefer know dese people dot writes for help. But dey trust me, dot's why dey write me. I'll send a telegram dot you are coming on de morning train, and he vill meechyou. Here's your railroad ticket. Train leaves ten o'clock in de evening, Lackavanna Station, Hoboken. Goot-by."

Mount Brookville—a lyrical name, real villagy, too; mount and brook, a place of promise—any village would be, if only far away from New York.

Ten o'clock that evening I was comfortably settled in a plush seat in the day coach of the Lackawanna train on my way to my American village.

The coach in which I rode was crowded with freshly arrived immigrants, mostly women and children, whose Old World baggage —sacks, straw baskets, wooden boxes, soiled and tattered—cluttered not only the seats and the racks but the aisles of the coach. They had evidently that day been released from Ellis Island and were on their way to join husbands, fathers, brothers, in the Pennsylvania mines. The noise, the smells, the screams of the babies, the jabber of foreign dialects, chiefly Slavish and not unfamiliar to me, made me feel as though I too had just come out of the steerage. True, I had been in the country nearly three years, I had learned the language, I had been in high school, but I had neither seen nor known much of America, had hardly lived in it. I too was on my

way to a new land—to a village, an American village. The people there were, of course, no muzhiks, for America was no Russia. But contact with grass, trees, birds, animals, earth, must have endowed them with qualities that I should enjoy and cherish. Mount Brookville! With the words on my lips I fell asleep.

It was still dark when the conductor jerked me into wakefulness. The next stop was Mount Brookville. Quickly I shook myself together and peered out of the window. Even in the dark I could make out trees, fences, pastures, meadows. We were in deep country now, far away from New York's East Side, and a great joy came over me. It was good to return to the milieu out of which I had come and which I had missed in the nearly three years that I had lived in the metropolis. I felt like exclaiming, "Good-by, New York! Good morning, America!"

At last the train stopped. I was the only passenger to alight, and as soon as I was on the platform the train clattered away into the darkness. I was all alone now. The station was locked. There was no light anywhere save in the signal blocks on the tracks. I searched the platform for someone to meet me, but no one was around. There was nothing to do but wait. The night was cool and damp, and having just come out of a stuffy train, I felt chilly. Crouching down on the doorstep of the station, I wrapped myself snugly in my coat, propped my head on my suitcase and shut my eyes.

Presently I felt something soft and moist on my ears and cheeks. Opening my eyes, I saw a dog, a big black dog With a shudder I jumped and ran toward the end of the platform, with the dog in clamorous pursuit. In the old village we were always afraid of strange dogs, and we never tried to make friends with them. It would have done little good, anyway, for, harried and abused as they were, they never had learned the language of friendship; they understood only their master's commands. Woe to the stranger who stepped within reaching distance of the fangs of watchdogs! If a strange dog ever strayed into our barnyard I threw sticks and rocks at him or whipped him into flight with a long willow rod. My sojourn in New York had not changed my suspicion and dread of strange dogs—nobody on our block had kept a dog, and nobody

had ever spoken of dogs with affection or respect. Naturally enough, I assumed that this dog was my enemy, and I instantly proceeded to treat him as such. I searched for a missile and, finding none, I ran on until I came to a heap of coal. Grabbing a handful, I threw it at him with all my strength and hit him on the back and on the leg. Howling and whining with pain, he limped off to the building across the depot, which was the milk station.

To protect myself against the possible onslaught of another dog or the return of the one I had hit, I loaded my hands with more pieces of hard coal. Presently a man appeared on the platform, sauntered up toward me and stopped. Daylight was already breaking up the darkness, and I could see anger on his ruddy and furrowed face.

"Did you hit my dog?" he asked.

I suspected trouble and remained silent.

"What in hell did you hit him for?"

"I was afraid he'd bite me."

"Christ," he fumed, "my dog hain't never hurt nobody round here."

I wondered if he was going to strike me and prepared to meet his attack with the pieces of hard coal in my hands. In the old village a man as angry as he would have swung out with his fists or perhaps with his feet. But this man never lifted a hand. In fact he held his hands in the front pockets of his enormous bib overalls. After a moment's silence he snapped out again:

"I don't know where in hell you come from, but I want you to know my dog's got as much right on this platform as you, get me?"

Confused and remorse-stricken, I looked at him and kept silent. After another pause, he shot out contemptuously, "You goddam fool," and walked away.

With his words ringing in my ears, I followed him with my eyes until he disappeared inside the milk station. Never had I heard of anyone speaking of dogs as having rights, other than those which the emotion, the convenience, the caprice of the moment might demand or dictate. The very concept of such rights was as new as it was challenging. Obviously, in the attitude toward dogs there was a hopeless clash between the old village and the new. Here was

something to remember and never to forget. Indeed, this was the first time in my life that I had known of anyone rising to the defense of dogs.

In spite of fog and a needle-like drizzle, daylight was opening up more and more of the immediate countryside. Only a short distance away, and running horizontally with the railroad, was a wood dividing the valley from the uplands. The sight of it stirred me with joy. In the old home the wood with its river and spirits colored not only our speech but our life. Of course there could be no spirits in this wood. The proximity of the railroad alone would make it uninhabitable for them, even as the endless craft on the East River in New York made its waters uninhabitable for the water nymph. Not only Blind Sergey but the most unenlightened beggar would know that much. Yet the presence of this wood on the edge of the new village enhanced its appeal and its meaning. A real village, indeed!

Because it was so near, I walked over to see it. At one time it must have been a primeval forest, and a little distance from the road some of the trees, especially the white pine, were immense, with the tops now lost in a crawling mist. My approach frightened a flock of crows. Amidst piercing cries they took to their wings. I followed them with my eyes, and for the first time in my life I had a friendly feeling for crows. In the old village they were as much a symbol of the dismalness of our destiny as were the abandoned dogs, the wolves, the mud, the Evil One. But not now. Rather were they a reminder of the exciting wildness of the old days. Were I to climb these gigantic trees to their very tops and discover the nest of the crows, I should not think of molesting them. The fledglings I should not fling to the ground and to death, as boys did in the old village. For the moment the crows, like the trees, evoked only hallowed remembrances. And so did the river that flowed windingly through the trees. A narrow stream and not deep, rocks jutted out of its bed, and over them the water coursed swiftly with a melodious gurgle. There could be no "devil's hole" in such a river, and perhaps it would be impossible to swim in it. But its presence completed the picture of a village which I had always borne in my mind. No, this was no mere suburb of a large city. This

was a real village, with all the wildness and the freedom that the word implied.

On my return to the railroad station I found it open, and when I stepped in I saw, behind the raised ticket window, a pale, thin-faced man with a reddish mustache and a taciturn expression. He seemed the kind who never sleeps well; or who, no matter how long he sleeps, is never really rested. Quietly he asked if I was Jim Hoyt's new hired man, and I said yes. He did not say "Mr James Hoyt," and I thought that was significant, in tune with the spirit of familiarity which I should expect of people living on land, precisely as in the old home, excepting that there people were known by their first names and their nicknames—So-and-so the Rabbit, So-and-so the Potato, So-and-so the Crow—and here they were addressed by the first name and surname. "He wanted me to tell you," drawled the little man spiritlessly, "his milk team will pick you up." Milk team—*I* should have said "milk wagon." Evidently the speech of these people had a twist of its own of which neither my dictionary nor my study book nor my grammar had made me aware.

Eager for conversation, I remained at the ticket window hoping the little man, in the manner of people in the old village, would ply me with queries about myself and thus afford me an opportunity to ask him questions about himself, Mount Brookville, and especially about this Jim Hoyt, who by this time had assumed the stature of the arbiter of my destiny. My mind was teeming with curiosity, but the little man displayed no inclination to talk. As if to emphasize his preference for solitude, he shut the window and remained locked inside his office.

I felt not only snubbed but bewildered. I never imagined that people in the country would prefer to remain so forbiddingly aloof from strangers. I wondered if Jim Hoyt was like that. I hoped with all my heart that the pale-faced station agent didn't typify the temper or the mood of Mount Brookville.

For lack of anything more diverting to do, I stepped outside again and looked around. Right across from the station was an immense yard set out with majestic spruce, and far away at the other end, looming out of the green like a patch of sunlight out of a cloud, was a brightly painted house, with enormous porches, that made me

think of a landlord's castle in the old village. I wondered if the man who lived there was a landlord, and if so what manner of man he was. Had not the station agent shown himself so averse to sociability, I should have rushed back and queried him about the castle and the landlord who might be inhabiting it. Instead I remained outside, further to survey the surroundings. The houses were large and square, with shingled roofs and immense porches, some painted a dull red, others as gray as the drizzle that was descending on them. They stood farther apart from one another, much farther than in the old village, and neither the street nor the yards were the beds of mud and puddles of slush that they had been in the old home. Stately spruce and maple shaded some of the lawns. Though there were no sidewalks, the road was packed with gravel, and the yards were carpeted with short grass. Here and there a garden was already plowed, and the earth, black and fat, was drinking in the descending moisture. I saw one man in rubber boots driving a black-and-white cow to a pasture in the rear of a house. Otherwise the place was deserted, and save for the gasps of the engine in the milk station all was silence. Beyond the houses were fields and hills, some of them rising so high that to me, accustomed only to steppes, they seemed like mountains. Tall timber crowned many of the hills.

This, then, was Mount Brookville or the beginning of it, for the street, as I looked ahead, rose steeply and was lost in the trees that were shading it. More than ever, I was overcome with curiosity as to the people who lived in the houses which I saw, the men, the women, the boys, the girls. I couldn't refrain from whispering an old-fashioned muzhik curse on the little man entombed in his office inside the railroad station.

Milk teams began arriving, more and more of them, and as they passed I searched the wheels with my eyes to see which had wooden and which had cast-iron or steel axles, so that I could tell, as I did in the old village, from the material of the axle whether the driver was a *bedniak* (poor man) or a *koolak*. But I saw no wooden axles, not one! Therefore, by the standards which prevailed in the old home, all these farmers were koolaks. A land of koolaks, that's what America was, or was it merely that this village was made up

of koolaks? The wagons were even more of a surprise than the axles. Not even koolaks in the old home had such large wagons, two and three times the size of the carts in which muzhiks drove around, and fitted out, not with baskets made of willow rods, but with boxes built of heavy planks or with huge racks; and not one of the wagons was packed with straw on which driver and passengers might sit, but all had ample elevated seats on springs, so that people riding in them wouldn't rattle themselves to stiffness. The horses were even more of a revelation than the wagons. Well shod, flanks and necks bulging with muscles, most of them freshly curried and brushed, they were a stupendous contrast to the scrawny creatures that most of our peasants had. Obviously the fare they were getting was more substantial than straw, clear or with a sprinkling of hay, with now and then, during the work season, a mess of oats, which was the usual feed our muzhiks gave their horses. Only landlords and officials and the Little Father of the parish church could boast of horses comparable to the ones that were now passing before me.

Some of the men as they drove by greeted me with a nod and a "howdy." Following on the heels of my experience with the station agent, the greetings were reassuring as to the sociability of the citizenry of Mount Brookville. After all, the little man might have come from somewhere else, perhaps from the city, and might not in any way be a farmer and therefore might be alien to the usages of people who lived on land.

I wondered which of the teams—the word was mine now—belonged to Jim Hoyt. Every time one passed by I expected the driver to yell out, "Are you Jim Hoyt's hired man from New York?" But no one did. Finally, to keep from getting soaked, I walked inside the station and waited.

Soon a young man entered, paused at the door and surveyed me critically. His face flushed, his felt hat shapeless and stuck with buttons advertising a brand of flour, he walked close to me in his rubber boots and asked in a low drawling voice if I was Jim's new hired man. He didn't say "Jim Hoyt's," just "Jim's." I said I was, and he invited me to ride home with him.

I sat down beside him on the spacious elevated seat, and off we drove. His name, he said, was Kent, and he too was a hired man.

Readily enough he answered questions about Jim. No, he wasn't exactly a young man, for he had already had his sixty-seventh birthday, and he might as well have been a bachelor, for he and his wife had parted years and years ago, shortly after their marriage. His farm was neither very small nor very large, about one hundred acres, with a big chunk of fine timber in the swamp. He had three horses, ten milch cows, six head of young stock, lots of chickens and three pigs. Accustomed as I was to evaluate farms in terms of the economics, not of an industrial, but of a pastoral, civilization—that is, in terms, not of a moneyed, but of a commodity, economy—Jim's possessions sounded impressive. Except for my father in his younger days, I could think of no koolaks in the old village who could boast of as many cows or as much land as Jim had.

"I suppose he is a rich man?" I asked.

"No, he ain't," came the quick reply. "He's poor; he himself says so, and everybody round here knows it."

To me this was a new conception of poverty. No wonder I had not seen a single wagon with wooden axles!

We followed a hilly road. The empty milk cans clanked noisily, and the white horse pulled the load at a brisk pace without Kent using a whip or saying a word. The fog was thinning, and as the clouds were rolling back from the hills they uncovered more and more of the lands they had concealed. The higher we climbed, the more gorgeous loomed the valley below, with its thick strip of forest, and the hills beyond, dotted with wood lots, orchards, plowed fields, houses, barns, silos, herds of wandering cattle, chiefly black and white. Nowhere a vestige of the flatness, the monotony, the primitiveness of the old village and the surrounding country. The more I saw of the wood, the more I was fascinated, and I asked Kent to tell me how far it ran. Surprised at the question, he said:

"Hain't you never heard of the nine-mile swamp?"

I shook my head. The very expression was new to me.

"You sure heard about the Loomis gang?"

I had to plead ignorance to any knowledge of the Loomis gang.

"I guess New Yorkers don't know much about the country, do they?" To him I was no foreigner, but a New Yorker.

"Well, sir, the Loomis gang was the toughest lot of bums this

county's ever known. They'd had their headquarters in this here swamp, with caves right in the muck big enough to hide stolen horses in, and nobody but they ever knew how to get to the caves. Then the sheriff and a lot of farmers rounded them up, and some of them run away, but Plum Loomis, the leader, was strung up on an apple tree, and folks 's been sayin' the tree's always got blossoms on it but hain't never borne no fruit. And you mean to say you never heard nothin' about the Loomis gang?"

"Not a word."

He gave a laugh of surprise, no doubt at the ignorance of the man from New York who had heard not a word of the most exciting event in the history of Mount Brookville and of the whole county!

Kent was bursting with curiosity about New York. He had never been there. His father and mother had never been there, nor had any of his brothers. In fact few folk from Mount Brookville had ever visited the big city, and Jim had been swearing he'd never want to look at the goddam place that was paying the farmer only two cents a quart for milk and selling it at ten and better. Then Kent asked if I played baseball. If I was a good pitcher, he said they'd challenge the Elbertsville team to a game and "lick the stuffin' out of them." He was visibly chagrined when I said that I had never pitched ball.

"Hain't you never played baseball?"

"No."

"Don't nobody play baseball in New York?"

"Yes, lots of people, but I never did."

"Gee, that's funny," and Kent gave a mocking little laugh.

Only in Stuyvesant High School had baseball seemed important. On East Broadway it was scorned. True, the American-born boys on the block had often tried to coax me into joining their game. But it was not much fun to play in the street amidst denunciations of pedestrians, teamsters and continual lookout for "the cops." Besides, it wasn't in my blood to get excited about baseball or any other American game. Yet now that Kent had shown such marked disappointment with my ignorance of it, I wished I had learned it, if only because it would have been a bond between me and the civilization in which I was to live. My experience with the dog

at the railroad station had convinced me, perhaps a little too poignantly, how ill equipped I was to fit into this civilization. Baseball would have been a help. However, Kent said no more on the subject.

"I s'pose there's lots of saloons in New York?"

"Yes, lots of them."

"Well, sir, there is three of them in Mount Brookville, and Jim says that's three too many."

"Doesn't he ever take a drink?"

"Sure he does, but he don't want no hired man to drink. There's lots of farmers like that. Every time they go to town, they stop for a beer or a whisky, but they don't want their man to go near a saloon. D'you drink?"

"Not much."

"Which d'you like best, beer or whisky?"

"Beer."

"That's all right. Jim won't say nothin' if you take a glass of beer, but if it was whisky you liked he'd sure raise hell with you. And it ain't because he's a churchman. He hain't never belonged to a church in his life, and he don't give a hoot about temperance, neither. He ain't never voted for it in elections. But he don't like to see a hired man get drunk and swear all over the place and abuse cattle and horses. He won't never touch whisky himself—for nothin' in the world. But I don't mind drinkin' it, and I ain't like my brother Pete, neither. He gets the best wages round here, because there ain't nothin' on a farm he can't do better than anybody else. But he throws away all his money on booze, an' I hain't never goin' to do that. No, sir!"

I was glad Kent was so talkative. The information he was doling out to me was more than enlightening. I was hoping he would go on without stopping.

"D'you get good vittles in New York?" he asked.

"Vittles?" I repeated. "What's that?" The word was new to me.

"Vittles—things you eat, hain't you never heard that before?"

"No, I haven't."

Again he gave a mocking little laugh.

"Well, sir," he went on, "I guess lots of things 's different in New York than they 's here."

"D'you get good vittles at Jim's?" I asked, delighted to use the new word.

"Not so bad. Emilia is one of the best cooks round here. There ain't nobody makes better flapjacks than she does, and oh boy, I sure do like them. I could eat flapjacks for breakfast and supper every day, 'specially if there was maple syrup to go with them. Corn syrup ain't so good. D'you like it?"

I shook my head merely to be in agreement, for never had I tasted either kind of syrup, nor had I ever heard of flapjacks and didn't know what the word meant. But I pretended understanding and, seeing Kent's enthusiasm for the subject of "vittles," I asked him to tell me what else Emilia cooked that he liked.

"Well, sir, her fried cakes are dandy, and her molasses cookies are 's good as any I'd ever tasted, and I hain't never known anybody bakin' as good johnnycake and chocolate layer cake. Just wait until early apples get ripe so she can bake apple johnnycake. I'll bet there ain't nothin' you've ever had in New York that's as good. Oh boy, I sure love apple johnnycake." From the glow in his eyes it was evident that the mere thought of it roused him to rapture. But to me the word was as new as "flapjacks," and equally new were the words "fried cakes." I had only known of doughnuts. "Molasses cookies" had a familiar sound, but I didn't recall ever having seen or tasted any. Intrigued by this new vocabulary and observing Kent's enthusiasm over the subject of vittles, I pressed on for more information.

"An' I'll bet," he said, "you've never eaten as good custard and pumpkin pie as Emilia makes, an' she don't mind if you take a second helpin', and Jim don't mind it, neither, 'cause he likes a second helpin' as much as anybody. An' did you ever eat corn mush?"

This too was a new word, but I wouldn't show myself completely ignorant of local table fare, so in reply I gave a brave nod.

"D'you like it?"

"It isn't so bad."

"I don't mind it once in a while, but Jim he can eat it every day for supper, and he likes his 'n with sugar and milk, but I want mine with maple syrup and milk. How did you eat it in New York?"

"With sugar and milk," I answered confidently.

"I'd rather have mine with maple syrup. I sure would," he added with emphasis.

At last we arrived at the farm. Jim's house was a large, two-story frame house, unpainted, with high windows and a shingled roof and shaded by sturdy maples and elms. On one side was a small orchard that was set out with rows of beehives, and on the other side were fields swelling into knolls and dropping into low-lands that were overgrown with brush. Straight ahead were more fields and a hilly pasture overrun with scrub trees, and in the rear beyond the barns was a meadow bordered by the mighty timber of the nine-mile swamp. The mixture of tilled and wild lands added to the attractiveness of the place.

Kent and I walked into the house, and on entering the living room my first thought was, "Where are the pigs and chickens?" So deep-seated was my association of a farmhouse with livestock that I expected to find at least pigs and chickens in the living room. There was only a dog there, and on sight of me he growled sullenly, but Kent instantly squelched him, and he lay down by the wood stove with his nose between outstretched paws. First Kent introduced me to Emilia, the housekeeper—a slight woman with a remarkably thin and pale face, friendly and vivacious eyes and sparse white hair on a small head. Then he introduced me to Jim.

"Glad to know you, sir," Jim said as he shook my hand and surveyed me penetratingly with his bulging blue eyes. The middle of his head was shiny with baldness, and the sides gleamed with the glassy whiteness of his short and unruly hair. His nose was short, straight and pointed; his ears were large, making his head seem smaller than it was; his jaw was broad and bony. A gray mustache, spattered with tobacco juice, overhung his mouth, and his hand as he had clasped mine was warm and rough. In his bib overalls, gray sweater with a tiny hole at the right elbow and his tight-fitting soft felt boots, he looked poor and unassuming, not at all like the koolak I had envisaged. His expression showed neither pleasure nor curiosity. Retiring to a rocker that had a gray cushion on the seat, he lowered his glasses over his nose and resumed read-

ing the paper that he had laid aside when I arrived. He asked no questions about my origin, my experience, my home life, as though he had not the least curiosity about me personally, which was as much of a surprise to me as my ignorance of the Loomis gang had been to Kent. Again I felt the enormous difference from people in the old village! There if a stranger came to live with a family, the man of the house, the women, the children would overwhelm him with searching personal questions. But not Jim, nor the station agent, nor even Kent. To them my private life was no open highway that they might traverse at will. Rather was it a retreat, which I might open only if I chose and which I always held under lock and key, with the key in my own keeping. At the moment I couldn't reconcile myself with such an attitude of aloofness, for I was bursting with curiosity about Jim, Kent, Emilia, their beliefs, their amusements, their desires, their private lives. Had I dared I should have shamelessly probed them to the depths of their souls. But their reticence froze my tongue.

As I surveyed the room I saw a telephone, a few little rugs on the spotlessly neat floor, and a huge photograph of William Jennings Bryan in the most prominent corner in the rear, precisely where in the old village peasants hung their ikons.

"You hain't had no breakfast yet?" asked Jim dryly and without looking up from his paper.

"No," I answered. He asked Emilia to give me breakfast, and while Kent took me to a room upstairs, which he was to share with me, Emilia set the table. When I came down she was at the door of the stairway and, pointing to the table, she bade me sit down and help myself.

As I sat down and searched the food with my eyes, I became embarrassingly aware of a problem that I had never faced and that I had not imagined any human being anywhere should ever need to face, namely, how to eat. In the old village we just sat down or stood up and ate. The fingers usually served the purpose of knives and forks, and neither the meat nor the potatoes tasted any the worse because of that. If we ate soup out of a common dish, our only concern was to hold in readiness a huge slice of bread with which to catch the drippings from the spoon as soon as we lifted it out of the dish. There eating was neither an art nor a cere-

mony nor even a display of good manners. Now, with the array of dishes and utensils, some of which I never had used, before me, I sensed at once that Mount Brookville possessed a code which reached out to the very table at which I was sitting and which my New York never had revealed to me. I had already become accustomed to a separate plate and knife and fork, but not to the display of the whole meal at once nor to the variety of food that greeeted my eyes. Had the table been in the kitchen, the problem would have been easier of solution. The proximity of cook stove, pump, washbasin, would have robbed the occasion of the solemnity and stiffness with which it was invested in the living room. Emilia and Kent were watching me out of the corner of their eyes, and Jim only now and then cast a furtive glance at me. For an instant I wished I had not said that I was hungry. It would have been easier had I waited for the family meal and followed the example of others. It was too late now to slip out of my commitment. Besides, I was overcome with hunger.

Braving myself to follow the dictates of my appetite, I reached out for the bread, potato and bacon. I ate heartily, and after cleaning up the plate I reached out for a second helping. In the course of eating, my perplexities vanished; when I finished the fresh helping, they rose again with a sharp painfulness. The fried cakes, crisp and brown, and the molasses cookies even more crisp and more brown, beckoned temptingly. Kent had spoken with such ecstasy of both that I yearned to taste them. But—what was the Mount Brookville code: was I to eat one of each or all of both? If only one, why were so many put on the plate, and if all, why had Kent complained that he never could get enough of them? Or was Kent's appetite for fried cakes and molasses cookies hopelessly insatiable? Unable to answer the disturbing questions, I decided to follow the line of least resistance and to touch none of the cookies and fried cakes.

Then, with a throb of recognition, I beheld, amidst the clutter of dishes, a deep bowl with a thick and fluid substance. At once I decided that it was soup. In the old village we ate soup for breakfast; in fact we seldom had a meal without soup. Often the whole meal consisted of bread and soup, and if there were other dishes, the soup always came last, as a dessert. Perhaps, thought I, Mount

Brookville, which after all was a village, accorded similar supremacy to soup? Joyously I reached out for the bowl and put it on my plate. The soup spoon in the bowl seemed only to confirm my surmise, else why should it be in the bowl? It was thick soup, but then that was the kind my mother had always made. The hot water with the few drops of fat and the few grains of cereal which passed for soup in New York restaurants, I had regarded as a mockery and a disgrace. With a glad self-confidence, therefore, I lifted the spoon and started eating what I had imagined was real American soup. Thicker than any I had ever tasted, I wondered why it was so fat and salty and mushy, impossible to chew and difficult to swallow? I wished I never had touched it, but since I had, I couldn't push it aside, not with Emilia and Kent and the dog and the omnipresent William Jennings Bryan from the portrait on the rear wall watching me and making me aware of my obligation as a gentleman to show fit appreciation of Emilia's culinary skill. With much effort I ate it all to the last spoonful.

"Have you had enough to eat?" Jim asked dryly as I arose from the table.

"Plenty," I answered, feeling heavy and uncomfortable. Forthwith I decided that never again should I touch a mouthful of Emilia's soup.

"Kent," said Jim, "ye'd better take Maurice down the barn and do yer chores and show him around."

As we walked out of the house Kent gave a loud and ominous chuckle.

"What are you laughing at?" I asked uneasily.

"At you," came the quick and slightly mocking retort, which was followed by an uproarious laugh.

"Why, what have I done?" I asked guiltily.

With an effort to control his laughter Kent said:

"Of course it hain't none of my business what you do at the table, but if I was you, next time I saw milk gravy I'd put it on my bread or my potatoes and I wouldn't eat it like a hog!"

I made no answer. I wondered what Emilia and Jim were saying to each other now that I was gone from the house. Eating milk gravy for soup! No wonder it was so impossible to chew and so difficult to swallow! I felt better when Kent informed me that Jim

had never had a foreigner work for him but he "sure done somethin' funny at the table," especially if he ate his first meal alone. Only the year before, a Pole with huge mustaches, whose name was Little Joe, had disgraced himself in no mean measure during supper when the pie was passed to him. It was mince pie, and it had been cut into three pieces. Little Joe decided he would take the largest piece. Lifting half of the pie out of the pan, he held it in both hands and, without bothering to put it on his plate, started eating it. After swallowing one mouthful, he decided he wanted no more of it and, leaning over, he put it back into the pan out of which he had lifted it. "Folks don't do such things round here," Kent warned, with a note of reprimand and amusement.

After supper Kent and I went up to our room and lighted the lamp. It was a large room furnished with a long table, two immense beds at opposite corners, a bureau and several chairs. One high window faced the road, and two others looked out on the meadow and on the nine-mile swamp. The size and the airiness of the room and the neatness of the floors, walls and furniture were cheering. At once Kent started talking about girls. He had never known any New York girls, and there was nothing he wished for more. He had been clipping pictures of New York girls from newspapers, and he liked to look at them and admire them. Forthwith he stepped over to the bureau, drew out a mass of picture clippings, showed them to me one by one and asked if I had ever met any of them.

"They sure 's pretty," he said, "only I guess they won't never have no use for a farmhand like me."

"Are there any pretty girls around here?" I asked.

"There are, and most of them go to the Baptist church."

"D'you go to the Baptist church?"

"I hain't yet."

"Why not?"

"My folks hain't never been very religious, and I guess I hain't meant to be, neither."

"But you could see the pretty girls in church."

"I sure could, and maybe someday I'll go there. Would you like to go?"

"Of course I would."

Looking over his pile of clippings, he murmured warningly, "But they hain't as pretty as these New York girls. I sure would like to know them," and after a pause he added, "Sometimes I dream about them, and I sort of see them as they are, with no clothes on, and oh boy, it sure is exciting!"

Then we talked of the village of Mount Brookville, which was nearly two miles from the farm. It wasn't much of a village, Kent assured me, and it ran in threes—three saloons, three hotels, three stores, three churches—the Catholic, the Methodist, the Baptist. Only the Baptist church was of much account, and most of the people went there, especially the young folks.

Lying in our beds, we talked for a long time. Kent chuckled with triumph, so pleased was he to answer the questions I asked and to tell me of the fun we could have if only we'd stick together and not divulge to Jim or Emilia anything they weren't supposed to know. Finally he asked me to blow out the light in the lamp and bade me good night.

I couldn't sleep. The newness of the place, the experiences of the day, the endless questions that flitted in and out of my mind kept me awake. The window beside my bed was open and, lifting my head, I looked outside. The skies had cleared, and the stars hung low over the buildings, the meadow, the wood. Crickets chirped incessantly, now and then a dog barked and an animal in the woods gave a whine. Then, coming out of nowhere and all lighted up, with sparks shooting out of the engine like flaming stars, a train clattered by and sped away into the darkness. The suddenness of its appearance startled me. It was as if the Evil One had glided by in disguise. But it was no evil one. It was a symbol of the power that had made Mount Brookville so bewilderingly different from the old village.

## CHAPTER XII

## *The Hang of Things*

AT THE TIME MY FATHER had twenty cows, our stable was without a single window and with no light except the shafts that pushed

through the crannies in the walls, the thatch roof, the door. When he had only one cow, our stable was still without a window. Not a peasant in our village or in the villages around but would have laughed with disdain had the notion of building a window in any of his barns been proposed. When indoors, our cows and our horses and all our livestock lived in darkness. When people were so poor, as so many of them were, that they could afford only small windows in their houses and when a pane broke they stuffed the hole with flax husks or horse manure, the very thought of spending money to provide sunlight or daylight for livestock would seem insane.

My father had our stable cleaned twice a year, in spring and autumn, and there were people in the village who thought he was wasting his time, cleaning it as often as that. They cleaned their stables only once a year, in the spring. Consequently our livestock lived not only in darkness but on an ever-mounting pile of manure, and if there was not enough straw for bedding, in a puddle of smelly slush. That was why our cows, though broad of frame, were always thin and gave little milk and in winter caught cold easily and often died from pneumonia. I had never heard or read of cow stables different from the ones I had known in the old village.

When, therefore, Kent and I walked into Jim's cow stable to do chores, I gaped with astonishment. Here was a stable with as abundant light as the house. The walls were whitewashed, precisely as was our house on the eve of Passover or those of the more affluent muzhiks on the eve of Easter. Equally astonished was I at the absence of the slushy bed of manure in which our cows always wallowed—nothing more here than what had gathered since morning.

Each cow had her own stanchion and her own manger. Never before had I seen so much comfort and privacy accorded to a cow. In the old village we let cows go loose in the stable or tied them by a rope to a rack, and we fed them on the floor or out of a tub. At Jim's their freedom was limited, but their comfort was immense.

The condition of the stable was only the beginning of an ever-mounting tide of surprises, shocks, revelations. As we were turning

the cows out to water in the creek that coursed through the barnyard, I heard Kent call them by name:

"Here, Betsie, get on with you. . . . Hey, there, Nellie, out, out. . . . Come on, Jennie, there hain't no use yer snoopin' for food now, go on, quick."

I watched and listened with ever-heightening curiosity and pleasure.

"Do all your cows have names?" I asked.

"They sure do, and don't ye never get them mixed when Jim's around or he'll yell like hell."

"I won't," I promised, and with Kent's help I immediately proceeded to memorize the names of all the cows. It was fun doing it, and more than fun was the idea of personalizing animals. It made farming and man's relations to animals a more intimate and family-like affair. Even if the initial purpose was solely utilitarian, in espousing the idea Mount Brookville displayed not only ingenuity but a sense of drama. You could talk of Betsie's cold or Jennie's calf with a stir of emotion that roused your solicitude and gave you a feeling of triumph when you cured the cold or helped Betsie in her labor when she brought a new calf into the world.

When the cows were in the barnyard, Kent and I proceeded to clean the stable. He worked with the manure fork and asked me to follow along with a shovel and scrape the leavings. When I had finished, Kent surveyed the floor and made a wry face.

"You hain't done it right."

"Haven't I?"

"No, you hain't," and, taking the shovel out of my hand, he ran it through one of the grooves and scraped out another shovelful of manure. "That's the way Jim wants his stables cleaned, see?"

I nodded.

"Now you do it on the other side."

I did as told, and Kent smiled with approval. Then I hung up the shovel on a hook beside the fork. Again Kent was critical.

"Gee," he said, "you hain't never learned to do things right."

"What's wrong now?" I asked with concern.

"I'll show you."

Taking the shovel off the hook and picking up a handful of

straw, he stepped over to the open window, and with the shovel over the manure pile on the outside he proceeded to wipe it with the straw. "See?" he said in triumph, flashing the shiny shovel before me. "I might's well tell you now," he went on solemnly, "Jim's awful partic'lar about his tools. He'll make you get up in the middle of the night to scrape the dirt off a hoe."

I laughed.

"I hain't foolin', neither."

I was sure he wasn't. Just the same I couldn't help being amused at such exacting meticulousness in the care of tools.

After spreading fresh straw on the floor, Kent and I ascended a ladder to the haymow, which was immediately over the stable. Again I was stirred by the ingenuity of Mount Brookville. In the old village we never kept hay or straw in the same building in which we sheltered the livestock. We carried the straw or the hay, or the mixture of the two, in a homemade netlike contraption with large and curved wooden handles, from the haybarn to the stable. The two were never together. Of course, that required extra time and energy, and if there was a shower or a blizzard outside, we got an extra drenching or an extra swirl of snow. But then time and energy were not like potatoes or even chaff, on which you needed scrupulously to economize. You were never short of either, and if because of age or illness your energy was ebbing out of you, there always was a son or wife or daughter or an in-law to replace it in abundance. Time and energy were the cheapest "commodities" in our ancient economy. But not in Mount Brookville. Here both were conserved with solicitude and ingenuity.

Even the pitchforks were different. They were not like ours, all of wood, without a scrap of steel anywhere, and so immense that raising one with the hand overhead made it possible to touch the top of a haystack. Here the prongs were of steel and the handle so smooth that it felt like glass and so short that in lifting a forkful of hay or straw you could prop the end against the inside of the thigh and make the lifting easy—that is, you could after Kent or someone else in Mount Brookville had initiated you into the trick.

The chute through which we were throwing the hay provided a delightful spectacle. Every time I pitched a forkful into its dark

maw I leaned over to see the hay glide its way down to the floor. I wondered why not even the German landlord in the old home, as wise a man as we had ever heard of and fresh from Prussia too, never had bothered to build a chute like the one Jim had in his barn. Of course the chute would be a boon to the Evil One. He could stay in the hay all the time, even in winter, because hay was so warm, and when he became hungry all he would need to do was to slide down the chute, get under a cow as a calf would and suck himself full of milk. Then he could climb back to the hayloft on the ladder, dig into the hay and sleep and sleep. He would not need to be crawling into people's houses through smoky and soot-soaked chimneys and, while lapping soup out of a pot inside the oven, run the risk of being poked by the housewife on the jaw or in the belly. He could eat and sleep, sleep and eat, until he got so fat that Kent and I could throw him out on the manure pile and bury him there. What a triumph that would be! If only Blind Sergey were around to deliver the funeral oration!

Finished with chores in the cow stable, Kent and I made our way to the horse stable.

"I guess," Kent said, "Jim 'll want you to look after the pigs and the horses while he and I're milking the cows." He explained that, mornings, the first thing I was to do was to lead the horses to the creek and get them watered. Then I was to feed them, first grain, then hay. Then I was to clean them all over with a currycomb and brush, to the least lump of mud or dung on the hair inside their hoofs. If I didn't, Jim was sure to yell and swear at me. Then I was to clean the stalls, raking and sweeping out every bit of dirt, and the last thing I was to do, evenings, was to bed the stalls with plenty of fresh straw. "See?" Kent proudly wound up his instructions. I nodded.

Then he took me to the pigpen. Jim had three little white pigs, for which he had sent to a farmer in New England. Kent spoke of them as porkers, another new word to me but easy to understand, and aptly chosen, for the pigs were to supply the pork for Jim's household. Kent explained that I was to keep the pigpen as clean as the horse stable.

"Jim says," he went on expansively, "that pigs 's about as clean

creatures as there's on a farm, only humans don't give them half a chance to keep clean."

I only had to look at the pigpen to assure myself of the falsity of the notion I had held that pigs are pigs, always squalid and always displaying uncanny genius in inventing ways to indulge a congenital appetite for squalor. The straw at the upper end of the pen on which they lay was surprisingly clean, and only the lower end was strewn with excretions. My esteem for pigs rose immediately.

When we finished with chores, Kent hitched up Billy and Betty, the bay and the white horses, to a huge wagon with an enormous wooden box and backed in alongside the two towering manure piles outside of the cow stable. We were to draw manure to the fields until dinnertime. The noon meal, I learned, was always dinner. Mount Brookville had no use for "lunch." I had used the manure fork no more than five minutes when I was covered with sweat, and the skin on my palms was getting loose and tender and was turning blue. I wondered if it was because doctors in New York had warned me to refrain from heavy physical effort. I was beginning to be disturbed. I had decided to ignore doctors and medicines and trust to nature and God, and here was I at my first real job on a farm and succumbing to exhaustion.

"Hard work," I complained, wiping the sweat off my face with the sleeve of my sweater.

"Of course it is," Kent said laughingly, "the way you go at it. You jest hain't got the hang of things."

The hang of things! What the devil did he mean? I searched my manure fork and my clothes—nothing was hanging anywhere. Piqued a little, I said, "I don't see anything hanging."

"I hain't said nothin' was," replied Kent with a touch of resentment.

"Yes, you did," I remonstrated. "You said somethin' about hanging, gettin' the hang of things, didn't you?"

"Sure, I did," Kent answered genially. "This is what I mean. Jest watch."

Sticking his fork into the manure pile a few inches, he swiftly bent it backward and shoved it horizontally as far as it would go, and then with little effort flaked off a layer of manure and flung it

easily into the wagon. He repeated the act several times and then I too realized that it was easier to peel off a thin layer of manure than to lift a whole section with one forkful. "Getting the hang of things" was surely more than a science in Mount Brookville. It meant convenience and comfort.

The cow stable was divided into two parts, the upper for the milch cows and the lower for the young stock—four heifers, one a two-year-old Holstein, sleek and sturdy and with short thick horns tapering to a sharp point. Jim sent me to let the young stock out to water while he was turning out the milch cows. No sooner did I lift the bolt of her stanchion than the two-year-old heifer snapped out her head and, posturing herself before me, lifted it high in the air and stared at me with an ominous curiosity. There was not much space between me and the back wall, and I grew uneasy. I remembered that, ever since a red cow had once lifted my sister on her horns, Mother had warned us never to stand in front of a horned cow or bull. And here I was face to face with this inquisitive and Holstein heifer, her horns poised as if for a thrust straight into my body. Seized with sudden alarm, I shouted at her to get out of the way and followed up my command with a hard kick on her shanks. Rearing backward, she banged into the wall and shook the whole stable, and then, letting out a succession of loud groans, she dashed in fright outside. Instantly the door to the lower stable opened and Jim thundered out:

"What in hell was ye tryin' to do?"

Because it was my first day on the farm, Jim's outburst of anger so completely disconcerted me that I lost my tongue. Pitchfork in hand, his jaws moving in accelerated rotation, eyes bulging with protest, he stared at me for a few seconds and then, emptying a mouthful of tobacco juice on the floor, he again thundered:

"Don't ye ever let me catch ye hollerin' at a cow or kickin' her. I'll knock hell out of ye if ye do." The sharp steel prongs of the pitchfork in his hand were no less menacing now than were the pointed horns of the heifer. I remained tongue-tied. The man's hot resentment was as unexpected as would be the sudden appearance of the Evil One, and was far more upsetting. After another pause he again yelled:

"I hain't never had a Rooshian or Polack man work for me but they's always hollerin' at cattle and horses and beatin' them. Why in hell d'ye fellows do that? Cows hain't no worse than humans and don't enjoy bein' hollered at and beaten no more than any of you Rooshian or Polack men."

Jim went back to the upper stable, and I remained in the lower one. I soon recovered from the shock of his scolding, and the question he had flung at me—"Why in hell d'ye fellows do that?"—pounded at my mind. Why, indeed? I had never put the question to myself, nor so far as I knew had anyone else in our family or in the whole old village. When cows or horses didn't mind, we yelled at them, whipped them and thought nothing of it. We knew no other way of bringing them to terms. Clearly I must "get the hang of things," not only with a manure fork, a shovel and other tools, but with horses, cows and other animals. I should think of the phrase every time I faced a new task or new ordeal, whether in the barn or on the land. It was the magic wand that was to divest new things of mystery and perplexity. Still I wished that Jim had not so explosive a temper. It was paralyzing to hear him thunder his words of rebuke, yet perhaps no more so than were my own shouts to the two-year-old heifer or would be to any of these pampered American cows in Mount Brookville. I vowed to myself that I would never again speak a loud word to any animal on a farm.

Daylight was beginning to merge into dusk when Jim came down to the barn with a shiny tin milk pail on each arm and a no less shiny tin strainer in his hands. He had sent Kent to town to fetch a load of grist, and he and I were to do the milking. He asked if I could milk, and humbly I said yes. In the old village I had seen Mother and other women milk cows, and I was certain that it required neither training nor talent to squeeze milk out of their udders. After giving me a pail and a milk stool, Jim pointed to a red mulley and said:

"Ye'd better start on Nellie—she's the easiest milker in the barn, and, remember, no more yellin' at cows, 'specially when ye's milkin' them. They're liable to hold up their milk or kick around and hurt themselves. Jest speak softly to them, 'So bossie, so bossie,' and

stroke them on the flanks, like this, see?" and with his own hands he stroked one of the cows.

"Very well, sir," I said.

Pail in one hand, milk stool in the other, I approached Nellie, and of a sudden I became aware that I didn't know whether a cow was to be milked from the right or the left side. Feverishly I sought to figure out on which side Mother milked our cow in the old home. Then it flashed on me that this was Mount Brookville, where everything from food to speech and work was so startlingly different from what it had been in the old home that cows, like pigs and dogs, might be trained in ways unknown to their kin across the ocean in the swamplands of Central Russia, and on that account they might seriously object to an Old World approach. Hadn't I had ample experience with my Old World ways, only to discover amidst embarrassment and agony that they fitted neither the conveniences nor the moods of Mount Brookville? However, there was no need of getting panicky. Grabbing a shovel, I proceeded to clean up the corner of my stable, merely for the purpose of passing the time until Jim finished feeding the cows grain and sat down to milk, and then I should do as he did. Innocent of my guile, Jim complimented me on my quickness in learning things, for it "sure hain't never a pleasure to step into a mess of turd."

With a flush of triumph I sat down on the milk stool and, setting the milk pail between my knees, I laid the tips of my fingers on two alternate udders, precisely as my mother would, and pressed down with great energy. At first not a drop of milk showed. I pressed still more strenuously, and soon milk came out in a thin curving streak. Encouraged by the results, I applied myself with all the strength I could muster to the task at hand. I was so busy squeezing milk out of the cow's udders that I had not been aware of the pail slipping into a slanting position and had not noticed that the milk was coursing down on the floor, on my overalls, on the pail, and only now and then in the pail. Never had I imagined that milking could be as strenuous a task as it now proved to be. My wrists ached, my back ached, my neck grew stiff, sweat poured down my face and trickled into my eyes, and presently I began to feel the wetness of my milk-drenched overalls. Jim, I assured myself, had been jesting when he said that Nellie was the easiest milker in

the barn. Easiest nothing! Of course she was the hardest milker, and he had deliberately falsified her status so as to give me the severest possible trial. I was grateful that Nellie was so busy stuffing down her grain that she never once lifted or turned her head in objection to the bungling manner in which I sought to get the milk out of her. Soon enough I heard Jim's voice:

"How 're ye gettin' on?"

"As well as I can."

"How many cows ye got milked?"

"Milkin' the same one."

Murmuring something which I didn't hear, he came over, and after a mere glance at me he exclaimed cuttingly:

"Sakes alive, man, don' ye kill yerself, ye hain't yet earned yer funeral expenses."

Drenched in sweat and milk, I never bothered to look up, but worked away feverishly with both hands.

"Ye hain't milkin', ye're takin' a bath, fellow," Jim burst out again, "an' if ye keep it up long enough like as not ye're goin' to get drowned."

Forthwith he launched into a tirade, not against me, but against those "blackleg New York employment agencies that had never yet sent him or any farmer in the county a man worth a damn." His neighbor Norton had a man who quit the day he arrived. A Balkan galoot, he blew up when he was told to help with the milking. He wasn't goin' to do a woman's job, not by a damn sight, and his neighbor Bert got a man who soaked up so much whisky in the saloon that when he saw a cow he thought she was an animal out of a zoo and whacked away at her with a pitchfork until he nearly killed her, and here was I unable even to hold a milk pail straight between my knees! What in hell were these blackleg galoots in New York thinkin' a farmer was—"a hayseed that don't know nothin' and hain't got no feelin's neither?" He quieted down for a while and then burst out again:

"I'll bet ye hain't never seen a cow b'fore ye walked into this stable."

There was no use feigning competence when I had none. Pained and angry with myself for being a failure at a chore which I had deemed as easy as breathing, and at Jim for stabbing me cruelly

with his reproaches, I arose, hung my pail on a nail and, saying nothing, started out of the barn. I was sure I should be discharged and decided that there was no use waiting for Jim to take the initiative. I would discharge myself. I might as well. I had only three dollars in my pocket and didn't know what I was to do or where I was to go, except that under no circumstances would I return to the tenements, the asphalt, the garbage of New York, where it was a crime to lie down and smell the grass in a park. I started across the yard and had already swung open the gate when I heard Jim calling:

"Where be ye goin'?"

"I don't know."

"If ye don't, how in blazes d'ye expect me to?"

I passed the gateway and started for the road when I heard him shout:

"Ye hain't quittin', be ye?"

For the first time I sensed a note of reconciliation in his voice.

"I might as well," I said. "I guess we do things differently in the old country," I added as an excuse for my failures.

"Don't ye want to learn to do them the right way?"

He didn't say "our way," but "the right way"; yet, hearing him make an attempt to win me back, I felt cheered.

"D'you want me to?" I wished to make sure that he really cared to have me return.

"Come back, and I'll teach ye how to milk."

The touch of humility in his voice made me forget his explosive temper. I went back.

"Ye hain't sore, be ye?"

I shook my head. With his thunder gone, he appeared more than friendly. Sitting down before Nellie, he called me close and, after embracing the udders, not with the tips of the fingers, as I had done, but with the whole hand, he said as softly as though he were addressing a favorite child, "Hold them with the whole hand and squeeze gently with them lower three fingers like this," and as he manipulated his hands the milk flowed out in a zooming stream and so fast that the white foam was rising higher and higher before my eyes. I had never known that cows could be milked so easily and so quickly.

Rising from the stool, he asked me to sit down, and after I did he stooped over and, with a patience of which I had deemed him incapable, he directed me how to manipulate my hands.

"Ye don' never pull a cow's teats," he said half in jest, "ye jes' squeeze 'em, and not too hard, see? And when yer wrists start achin', go down the creek and soak them in cold water."

My wrists never stopped aching, and several times I soaked them in the cold water in the creek, but the joy of mastering "the hang of things" with a cow's bag was so immense that I didn't much mind the ache.

Thus far in my effort to accustom myself to the ways of Mount Brookville I had brought on myself trial, embarrassment, humiliation. The next morning I was to taste catastrophe. Jim wanted the harnesses repaired and oiled, and rightly enough he thought Kent could do it better than I. So he sent me to the station with the milk. As I left the house he said, "After ye get yer cans loaded, be careful how ye turn. Take as wide a swing as ye can," and with his hands he demonstrated how to steer the horse so as to make a wide swing with the wagon, "else ye sure 'll land in the creek."

Confident that I could steer the horse properly, I drove off, loaded the cans and pulled the lines precisely as Jim had indicated—so I thought. But the horse made an abrupt turn over the bridge, and the next instant horse and wagon and milk cans and I were splashing in water. The cover of one can came off, and the milk spilled out. Luckily the covers of the other two cans were rammed down hard and didn't fly open. Hurriedly I set them out on the bank of the creek. But how was I to get the horse on his feet? The thills were pressing on him so severely that he couldn't rise and couldn't breathe freely. With my hands and my whole body I attempted to lift him, and he was willing enough to co-operate, but the pressure of the thills was too much for our combined strength. I felt like crying and was already on the verge of running to the house in quest of help when another team swooped down on the bridge, two white horses drawing a huge hayrack loaded with clanking milk cans. The driver was a young man, short, wiry, sunburned and with merry blue eyes. Quickly bringing his own horses to a halt, he jumped into the creek and unhitched the horse from the wagon.

Swiftly and eagerly the horse leaped to his feet, and I felt immeasurably relieved. At least the creature was not injured. But why hadn't I thought of unhitching the horse? I just hadn't. "Getting the hang of things" was an infinitely more complex task than I had imagined. In a few minutes we had the cans loaded and resumed our journey to the milk station. We talked as we drove along. He told me his name was Alexis and that he lived on top of "Quaker Hill," which was "one mile coming down and ten going up." His father was incapacitated for work, and he was running the family farm. But he didn't think much of farming as a life work, and winters he was studying in high school and hoped someday to take up medicine and be a country doctor.

The word "Quaker" was not unfamiliar to me, not only because I had read Hawthorne in high school, but because while a student in a Russian public school I had heard that at the time when Tolstoy appealed in the London *Times* for help for the Doukhobors so that they could leave their homeland, which persecuted them for their opposition to war and to military service, and emigrate to Canada, the Quakers were among the first to respond to the appeal. The word therefore had a familiar ring and was invested with warmth and reverence. When Alexis invited me to come up some Sunday and visit him, I was excited at the prospect of seeing Quakers in the flesh and talking to them and telling them how even children in the Russian public schools admired them for their aid to the Doukhobors.

That evening, when Kent and I were in our rooms, Kent said:

"You sure must've drawn on the inside instead of the outside line to get tipped over like you did."

Since Jim, when I told him of the accident, had made not a word of comment, but only gave me a stabbing look and tightened his lips and accelerated the movement of his jaws as he chewed his tobacco, I said:

"Has Jim said anything about it?"

"Has he? Jimminy Christmas! That's all he's been hollerin' about all mornin', but he don't want you to know it, 'cause he's afraid you'll quit."

"Doesn't he want me to quit?"

Kent's intimation was as unexpected as it was cheering.

"He sure don't, 'cause he thinks you're catchin' on fine and you hain't the kind that gets drunk Saturday nights."

Then he gave a loud laugh.

"What 're you laughing at?" I asked.

"At Jim hollerin' so. I suppose he's scared you stiff the first time you heard him?"

"He surely has."

"He don't mean nothin'. That's his way. Wait till you hear him hollerin' at the Republicans! Jumminy Christmas!" and he roared with laughter.

I had been on the farm three days now—epochal, overwhelming days! I had soaked up immense amounts of information and experience and had endured no little anxiety and torment. I had learned much and had unlearned even more about cows, horses, dogs, pigs, stables, land, food, people, and about the America I had yearned to know, to live with, to feel with the very warmth of my flesh. More, much more, was in store for me, in experience, excitement, humiliation, elucidation. But what of that? My health was so good now that I wondered how I ever could have thought myself ill. Contact with fields, trees, streams seemed to have filled me with an ozone that burned up fatigue and all the aches I had known. More than that—I had recovered something that I had lost in New York, a curiosity, a joy, an aspiration which gave fresh meaning and fresh tang to life. I felt happy, and yet when I reflected on the contrasts between the old village and the new, I grew sad. There were charm and humaneness in the old place. Legend and drama peered out of the very shimmer of its mud, the very glow of its magnificent birches. But it was such an ancient world, and so moldered with age that its whole structure could easily be pushed into dissolution. Not only a vast ocean and vast continents separated it from Mount Brookville, but ages and ages of experience, knowledge and wisdom. Multitudes of things its people had to unlearn, multitudes more they had to discover. They had to remake themselves inside and outside to attain something of the worldliness of the people in Mount Brookville. Yet someday they too

would learn that dogs had rights. Someday the gleam of steel would also illumine their way of life.

Someday!

## CHAPTER XIII

## *"Higher Learning"*

NEITHER KENT NOR I chewed tobacco or smoked, and Emilia felt so grateful that she complimented us on our "decent habits of livin'." If men, she said, felt that they couldn't live without tobacco, she had much rather that they smoked. Men who smoked were less dismal to look at and less bothersome to look after than men who chewed. Tobacco ashes never soiled linen and the floor like tobacco spit, and she had never yet known a man who smoked or chewed but who slipped up on his promise not to scatter ashes or spit too wantonly. That went for Jim, too, who tried hard enough to abide by his good intentions but often was so absorbed in his reading that his mouth spilled over with tobacco juice, and some of it dripped out before he got to the spittoon. That was why he usually kept one near his rocker in the living room and near his bedstead in the bedroom. But sometimes he would read on the couch and forget to move the spittoon to his side, and when caught unawares with an overflowing mouth he did the best that a gentleman could do.

Yet some men, Emilia wandered on, hadn't it in them to be gentlemen and never showed appreciation of the womenfolk who looked after them. Once they had a man who pulled poles in hop picking, and he was the worst offender against good manners she'd ever known. Because he was a good worker, Jim engaged him to stay on for a few weeks after the hops had been picked. He was never without a wad of tobacco in his mouth, yet unlike Jim he would under no circumstances tolerate a spittoon near his bed or chair. He prided himself on his unfailing ability to reach it with his mouth, even with his eyes shut and in the dark, no matter how far it might be from where he was standing, sitting or lying. Had his marksmanship been as perfect as he boasted, it wouldn't have

mattered, so Emilia assured me; not too much, anyway. But often it failed him dismally, and the resulting mess on the floor, on the wall, or even in the bed was enough to upset the stomach of any decent folk. Finally he had to be told that unless he mended his ways and kept a spittoon near his bed or his chair and refrained from taking chances with his marksmanship by light or in the dark, he would be obliged to make his own bed and sweep and scrub the floor of his room. Enraged with this ultimatum, especially as it implied distrust of his skill in this particular kind of marksmanship, he rushed to his room, packed his things and, swearing "like a blue streak," walked out and never came back!

In appreciation of Kent's and my abstinence from tobacco Emilia kept our room in a condition of superb neatness and comfort. Once a week she changed our linen—sheets and pillow cases, two of each instead of the one to which I had become accustomed in New York. In our old home in Russia, Mother used sheets on the Sabbath and on holidays only, and then not to sleep on or for cover but for ornament over the straw mattresses and the quilts in our two beds, hers and Father's.

What stirred my warmest admiration for Emilia was her masterful victory over flies. If any ever flitted into the kitchen she couldn't rest until with a homemade fly swatter she rid the room of their presence. In the light of my memories of the old village, this loomed as a superhuman accomplishment. I never had imagined that it was possible anywhere in the world to protect a farmhouse from flies. Indeed, I had come to think of them as an integral part of the annoyances of farm life. With the beginning of spring until late autumn all of us in the old village were at their untempered mercy. They not only flitted at will into our soap, our milk, on our bread and jam, but scampered all over our noses, our lips and other exposed parts of our bodies. The most dependable alarm clocks we had, they wakened us with a vengeance at the first gleam of dawn. Nor were we any more successful in our fights on fleas and bedbugs. Endless were the torments to which they continually subjected us, and there was hardly a house in the village but on cold days its warm brick chimney gleamed with clusters of roaches. That was why so many of us, especially the young people, slept outdoors or on hay in the barn in summer.

Yet at Jim's our room was so clean that even in the daytime, with sun flooding the bed, the floor, the ceiling, I could sleep restfully, as I often did on Sunday afternoon, and unmolested by the least tickle or hum of an insect. Emilia smiled with pleasure when I told her that in the old country I had never known a housekeeper on a farm who had achieved as complete a victory over insects as she had.

"We's clean folks in this country," muttered Jim from over his newspaper.

Yet when haying time came and the fragrance of freshly mowed timothy and drying clover kindled my blood with a zest for adventure, I told Kent that it might be fun to sleep outdoors on the hay. At first Kent demurred—only hoboes slept in the hay, and they couldn't help themselves. Then he laughed. Then he grew interested. Then he agreed to try it once, anyway. When we spoke to Emilia about it she was perplexed and annoyed and a little hurt. I assured her that we were doing it only for fun and of course not because we were displeased with the condition of our room or our beds, which were always superbly clean and comfortable. Then Jim came to our defense.

"Let them do as they have a mind to," he declared, with an expansiveness that roused my suspicion as to the sincerity of his approval. But at the moment I gave the subject no further heed.

"And what 'll ye do when it rains?" asked Emilia.

"They'll get soaked," Jim responded tersely.

"No, we won't," I countered. "We'll dig in the hay as we did in the old country."

"Go on, boys," urged Jim, "get goin', and I hope it don't rain."

The night was warm and moonlit, and with enthusiasm Kent and I bunched a lot of hay together, rolled up in our blankets and were ready for sleep. Our dog had joined us and lay at our feet. Kent was more than pleased with the adventure and spoke gratefully of my powers of persuasion. Brimming over with joy, I assured him that the next night he would not think of sleeping indoors, and it would make no hobo out of him, either. But neither of us had reckoned with the Mount Brookville mosquitoes. In the old home the nights were cool, and mosquitoes rarely bothered the young people who went on *nochleg* and the others who sought

peaceful sleep outdoors. But in Jim's meadow, with the nine-mile swamp in full view and with the nights warm enough to mature the corn, the mosquitoes soon descended on us in swarms. I suggested to Kent that we hood our heads in our blankets or dig deep under the hay. But Kent saw no sense in sleeping outdoors if we had to cover our faces with hay or with the blanket. I then advised patience, in the hope that the mosquitoes would tire of being slapped to death. But the more I hoped, the less eager they seemed to leave us. Fresh swarms kept coming from all directions. Kent sat up and said grouchily that it was no use fighting them, and we had better go back to the house. I argued and expostulated, and finally the mosquitoes got so unbearable that without a word of further colloquy we jumped off the hay and started for the house, the dog following along and yelping with disappointment, or perhaps with relief.

We decided to enter by the woodshed door, which was never shut, and tiptoe our way upstairs to our room without Jim or Emilia hearing a sound of our movements. To our amazement the woodshed door was bolted.

"Jim done it on purpose," cried Kent, and now I understood why Jim had so readily approved of our proposed excursion into the hay. He had expected trouble and inwardly reveled at the opportunity to twit and punish us for our foolhardiness.

Resolved to cheat him of the pleasure, I said:

"Let's not give in, Kent."

"What d'you mean?"

"Let's go to the horse barn and spend the night in the haymow. No mosquitoes 'll bother us there."

"Christ," he cried again. "I've had all the hay I'm agoin' to have the rest of my life, and don't think you can change me, neither." Boldly he knocked at the door. There was no response. He knocked again and with no better results. Then I started knocking, and he joined me, and we both knocked at once, and finally Jim's voice shot out harshly from within:

"What be ye galoots knockin' for?"

"We want to get in," replied Kent.

"Ye can't, folks 's asleep here."

"It's me, Jim," Kent declared, "me and Maurice."

"It don't make a damn bit of difference who ye be, folks 's asleep here."

Enraged, Kent started swearing at the top of his voice. Then we heard Emilia threatening to go and open the door herself if Jim was bent on punishing us. Grumbling and swearing, Jim came to the door and unbolted it. In his long, light-colored flannel nightshirt and bare feet he seemed both comical and formidable, and without a word of rejoinder Kent and I slipped upstairs and crawled silently and with relief into our beds.

Never again in all the years that I worked on farms did I have the least desire to sleep in hay, indoors or outdoors. In Mount Brookville it was neither adventurous nor comfortable to indulge in this Old World pastime.

"Ye'd better hitch up the team to the disk harrow," said Jim one morning, "and drag the cornfield, once up and down and once diagonally across."

I did as bidden, and when I finished I unhitched the horses and started for home. On the way I met Jim.

"Where be ye goin'?" he inquired, a little belligerently.

"I've finished draggin' the cornfield," I answered.

"Maybe ye hain't," he threw back in angry doubt, and asked me to follow him back to the cornfield.

"Look at them lumps there in the hollow and all around the knoll," he remonstrated after surveying the field.

I nodded, which only fanned Jim's pleasurable resentment.

"What in hell kind of a farmer folks 'd think I was if I allowed them lumps to be starin' out of the ground like elephants!"

The swiftness with which he kept rotating his jaws and the frequency with which he emptied his mouth testified too eloquently to the violent emotion which accompanied his words.

"Get yer horses hitched again," he commanded, "and by God, don't ye dare get them unhitched until ye hain't got a single lump of dirt left in the field and the seedbed 's as fine as ashes."

I wondered if there ever would be an end to the things that I had to unlearn! Suppose my father or Blind Sergey or any of our other old neighbors were around to listen to Jim's discourse on the subject of a properly harrowed seedbed? They might have laughed

with scorn, and subsequently, if convinced of the justice of his words, might have sighed and wailed in self-pity because their wooden or wood-framed harrows could no more break up the lumps of dirt as finely as Jim demanded than they could dry the mud in their yards and in the street with their warm breath. There was not a man in our village who had seen a disk harrow or had ever heard of the implement.

As I started with the horses, Jim admonished once more:

"Don't ye forget what I tol' ye—keep on draggin' until them lumps 's all gone and folks can't say Jim Hoyt don't know how to farm it right."

Another lesson in farming awaited me on my return to the barn with the horses. I found Jim on his knees on the floor mixing corn with tar in a huge wooden bucket.

"What 're you decorating the corn for?" I asked.

"So's to make it look pretty," he snapped back.

I gave a laugh.

"Don't ye like pretty things?"

The corn in the bucket was all black and sticky, and Jim threw in ashes and stirred it once more to take off the stickiness. I was interested and puzzled and waited for the real explanation, which I knew would be forthcoming. Presently he said:

"I am a-doin' this so's to fool the crows. There hain't no smarter birds than crows, and when the corn's yellow it makes no difference how deep ye plant it, the damned cusses can see it, and then it's good-by corn. But if it's black and gets mixed with the dirt, they hain't smart enough to tell the difference, and then the corn's got a chance to get somewhere."

Now I knew why we had so many crows in the old village. They chose to live in a part of the world where man had not yet learned to outwit them. Certainly nobody in our village had ever thought of attempting it. We would set out scarecrows in our gardens but not in our fields. Of course we grew no corn—the climate was too cold. But crows loved all grain, and the rye on which we depended for our very lives was no more distasteful to them than American corn, and they picked it up with no less zest and assiduity. Because all our farmers sowed by hand and had only wooden harrows or

wood-framed ones to run over the sowed fields, much of the seed remained visible to the naked eye, and it was no trouble for the youngest and most inexperienced crows to pick their living not only in our rye fields but on all our grain lands. No doubt that was why crows from all over the world flocked so readily to our village—for an annual vacation or for permanent sojourn. We despised them so much for the ruin they visited on our fields that we shot them, caught them in traps and beat them to death with clubs and climbed trees and destroyed their nests and threw their helpless offspring to the ground and to certain death. We had found no way of outwitting them either through the use of grain drills, which would bury the seed so deep in the earth that they could not dig it out with their beaks, or at least could dig very little of it—or by disguising it as Jim did.

Now I discovered a fresh reason for the cruelty of our muzhiks toward living things, a cruelty which, when I spoke of it, shocked Emilia, baffled Jim and made Kent laugh.

The tools I used excited me even more than did Jim's highly reasoned methods of tillage, not only because they were new and possessed the appeal of discovery, but because of the intelligence and forethought that went into their making. Unlike the tools we used in the old village—many of them homemade, with or without the help of the local blacksmith or carpenter—the American tools represented highly complicated processes of thought, the purpose of which it was easy to understand. The bowlike handles of scythes, for example, were easier on the hands than were the ones with the straight handles that we had used in the old home, and gave greater momentum to the mower's swing. The light, sharp-edged blade of the hoe, with its long handle, lent itself more readily to close manipulation around delicate plants than did the massive ones we used at home, which had short handles, and the corners of whose blades stuck out almost like the snout of a hog. The square-shaped manure fork, with its four light springy prongs, was an infinitely greater convenience than the one we had used with two long stiff and heavy prongs. The corn planter and the grain drill distributed the seed more evenly and buried it in the earth more effectively than could the most expert human hand, and the mowing machine

and hay rake and horse fork, which I had likewise never seen, accomplished marvels that stirred me to ecstasy. Not a tool I was obliged to use, whether it was wielded by the human hand or drawn by horses, but was a stirring revelation of man's wisdom and accomplishment. The more I used the modern machine, the greater was the change it wrought in my understanding of farming, of man, of life and of everything that I had ever learned of man's relation to the world outside himself. Jim, of course, derived no little amusement from my eagerness and often enough took advantage of my ignorance. When, for example, he brought to the field the corn planter that he had borrowed from a neighbor, he said in mock earnestness:

"I'll bet ye hain't never seen this tool."

"No, I never have. What is it for?"

"To catch mice."

Kent roared with laughter.

"What be ye laughin' at, ye silly galoot?" Jim remonstrated, with simulated indignation. Turning to me, he went on, "All ye've got to do is set this thing on top of that rock yonder and the mice 'll come scootin' over and jump straight inside the box here, and then ye clap the cover down and take them to the creek and drown them, and yer fields 's all cleared of mice."

Kent started laughing again and when I joined in the laughter Jim said:

"Ye don't believe what I just said, do ye?"

I shook my head.

"I don't, neither."

Once, as we were getting ready to rake a hayfield, a sudden shower came up. As we watched it from the tool shed, I saw myself and Kent spending days turning the hay with forks, over and over, so as to get it dried, precisely as my father and mother used to do whenever our hay got drenched with rain. Because it would set us badly back in our work, I told Jim that I was sorry it had rained so suddenly. But Jim showed no sign of distress. "If there's good sun tomorrow we'll get her cleaned up quick," he said. The next day, when the sun came out full and hot and Kent began working with the hay tedder, I appreciated the meaning of Jim's words and his

confidence. The forks of the tedder picked up the hay and whirled it upward in bunches, so high and with such force that they shook out the rain and let the hay drop to the ground all fluffed up so that sun and wind could dry it quickly. As I watched the forks flit up and down, I could hardly believe that a machine could perform so many operations at once and with such brilliant skill. For a while I followed the machine as if to reassure myself that my eyes weren't deceiving me.

Kent took it all as a matter of course, with not a glimmer of the emotion that he displayed whenever Emilia put on the table a raspberry pie or a fresh comb of honey. Had I revealed to him the emotion with which I was overflowing he might have laughed at me, perhaps with good reason. So I said nothing. I only asked him if he would let me ride the machine. Obligingly enough he said, "Sure thing." Descending from the seat and explaining how to manipulate the lever, a simple enough process, he turned the lines over to me and said, "Get on there." The ease of handling the machine only added to the excitement of operating it. I shot my eyes back now and then to watch the forks do their superb kicking and shaking and fluffing of the hay, and as I did so I couldn't help thinking what a boon a hay tedder would be to the people in the old village, where every blade of grass counted and where so much of it rotted because the human hand couldn't combat nature's caprices as brilliantly as the amazing machine I was riding. Here was another rung on the stepladder of civilization which those indefatigable and ancient-minded muzhiks were someday to climb, perhaps with no more of a strain than it took to lift a freshly sawed log into a sled, perhaps with hands and faces dripping with sweat and blood.

Nor could I suppress an emotion of amusement and scorn for those prophets of doom on East Broadway whom I had heard curse the machine as man's deadliest foe, robbing him of pleasure in work and in living and reducing him to the condition of a flail or a spade or any other tool on a farm. That might be the case in a factory, but on a farm the machine not only meant a deliverance from menial toil but added enormously to the sheer joy of work and yielded astoundingly bountiful results.

In the old village I had been living in the age of wood. In Mount

Brookville I was living in the age of steel, and the transition from the one to the other was the most exciting and most enlightening experience I had ever known. It was higher learning at its most robust and noblest.

## CHAPTER XIV

## *Bees and Woodchucks*

Soon enough, bees stirred my interest almost as much as machines. Kent loathed bees. He loved honey. He couldn't get enough of it, and when Emilia served flapjacks or corn mush and his gimletlike eyes discovered no honey on the table, he grumbled with disappointment. Emilia likewise was none too pleased with so many hives near the house. She would have been happy had Jim deemed it suitable to cart them all down to the swamp. On hot days, when the bees worked feverishly in clover and alfalfa fields, she would seldom venture outdoors and then not too near the hives. At the buzz of an approaching bee she would shiver with fright, and in spite of Jim's admonitions to keep calm she would throw her apron over her head and run for cover. But to Jim bees were not only a source of income and a diversion but a cosmic miracle—the one supreme compensation for the villainies, stupidities and failures of man, among which were the continuous victories of the Republican party in the county.

"They's a damn sight smarter than us humans," he expatiated with fervor. "They never go off to saloons and get drunk and neglect their work as we humans are a mind to do, and there hain't nothin' they do but God himself couldn't do it 'ny better, and if ever a hobo sneaks inside the hive and tries to live off their labor, they make it so hot for him he's glad enough to run for his life, and sometimes he hain't got a chance to run and 's carried out dead and thrown to the wind. They hain't never no use for loafers and cheats and yahoos and scalawags, like us humans, and when their queen comes back from her honeymoon they go after the good-for-nothin' drones and just kick and starve them to death and get rid of them like we humans never do with the drones that's suckin'

their livin' out of us. That's how smart they are. There hain't nobody in the whole world, not even Napoleon, that's ever been as smart as they, and there hain't never goin' to be, neither."

"But they sting like hell, Jim," said Kent irascibly.

For an instant Jim stopped chewing his tobacco and glared fiercely at Kent.

"Sting? Good God, and why shouldn't they when folks that ought to know better gets in their way? I've told ye lots of times not to stand in the line of their flight when they's in a hurry to go off and make honey for ye and they's a-comin' back loaded to the gills with it. By Jesus, if I was a bee and folks didn't know no better than to be in my way or abuse me when I was workin' my head off to get honey for them, I'd sting a damned sight harder, and don't ye forget it, neither."

"Don't you ever get stung?" I asked.

"Sure I do."

"And you swear too, and don't say you don't," Kent broke in gloatingly.

"I hain't said I didn't. Of course I swear like a loon, 'cause I hain't got more sense than the rest of ye humans. We's all inferior to bees in intelligence, every mother's son of us. If we wasn't, d'ye suppose we'd be lettin' the New York dealers cheat us on our milk like we been doin' all these years? Two cents a quart! By Christ, sometimes I think we'd be better off if we dumped it in woodchuck holes and fattened the woodchucks, and ate them like Bill Young and his family of Indians 's been doin'."

I often thought that the one thing in the world Jim really loved was bees. There was nothing else on the farm of which he spoke with such tenderness and reverence, and nothing roused his ire more than the complaints of neighbors that his bees got after them in their gardens and in their berry patches. When he saw that I showed an interest in bees, he talked for hours of the marvelous things that happened in hives.

"Everythin' there's figured so close that ye wonder how such little things as bees can do it. Look at the combs, how they build them out and fill them up and seal them so tight not a drop of the honey can spill out, no matter how ye hold them in yer hands. And

when they need a new queen they raise her, and when they need drones they raise them and pamper them, and when they get all the use they can out of them they get rid of them so they won't have to feed them no more for nothin'. Yes, Maurice, there hain't nothin' in the world so pretty as the inside of a well-run hive, and only galoots like Kent 's shoutin' their heads off when they get stung because they're in the way, which they hain't no business bein'."

When Jim saw how timid I was the first time I followed him to the apiary, he shouted, "Ye hain't never goin' to be no good with bees if ye's afraid of them. Ye've got to trust them and love them, and then if ye gets hurt ye've got only yerself to blame. Remember that, young fellow."

Not a day but he went around the hives, cutting down the grass in front and adjusting the little board runways so that the work bees could easily take off to the fields or alight on their return when they were loaded with pollen and nectar. Again and again I saw him with strings and clusters of bees on his hands, his nose, his baldish head, and he seemed as unconcerned as though they were leaves off a tree or petals off a flower.

During the swarming season he taught me how to hive freshly formed swarms.

"Don't ye ever forget to spread a dry sack in front of the hive so they can walk in with no trouble," were his final instructions as he once sent me to hive a swarm that had gathered in a cluster on a fence post. Wearing a veil and a coat and gloves, I braved myself to approach the buzzing cluster and carefully shook it into the basket. At once a thick spray of living things shot right over me, but Jim shouted to me not to be afraid and to go on and dump the basket on the sack in front of a hive.

"Don't ye run now, just walk as though ye was their friend and they won't do ye a bit of harm."

There were bees on my gloved hands and on my coat, but though quaking with uneasiness, I was resolved not to betray it in any act and to be as cautious as Jim had urged me, and only once was I stung.

"Ye're a much better man with bees than I had a notion ye'd be," he said with pleasure, and I glowed with a sense of triumph.

One day while I was working in the hopyard the dinner bell rang. As it was too early for the meal, I knew that an emergency had arisen which demanded my immediate help. I ran to the house, and sure enough there was such an emergency. A swarm had clustered on the top of a tall and lean pear tree, and Jim wanted me to hive it.

"I guess I'm a little too old to climb this tree," he said, "and I thought ye won't mind doin' it."

Flattered by his trust, I quickly donned a veil, gloves, a coat, and after carefully setting the ladder against the pear tree I mounted the rungs. When I was within reaching distance of the swarm, I hoisted the pole to which was attached the hiving basket and shook the limb on which the cluster hung. In doing so the pole swung to one side and poked half of the swarm loose, and only half fell inside the basket. Where the queen was, I of course couldn't tell. In an instant I felt as though innumerable spears were penetrating every part of my body. I sought with all my will to hold the pole, but I was stung so mercilessly that I dropped it to the ground, and now there were fresh attacks on me, with the stings reaching through every piece of clothes I wore. Nor was Jim spared. Shouting with fury, he ran into the woodshed and, overcome by stinging bees, he forgot everything he had ever told me about handling myself in a crisis and slapped away with both hands and with as much wildness as the bees showed in their attack. To add to the catastrophe, Kent was coming down the hill, with the team hitched to an empty hayrack. The bees swooped down on him and on the horses and, dropping the lines and crying and swearing at the top of his voice, he started fighting them with both hands. Meanwhile, grown panicky from the stings and from Kent's shouting, the horses broke loose so wildly and with such a speed that Kent fell into the hayrack and cried more fiercely than ever. From indoors Emilia shouted to Jim and me to run quickly and help Kent. Luckily the horses sprinted into the barnyard and stopped abruptly at the barn door. Save for a badly swollen eye, Kent was unhurt, though from his continuous cries and his threats to leave "the goddamn farm" unless the bees were "chucked in the river in the swamp," one might have assumed that he had barely escaped death.

The supper hour that day was no feast of joy or reconciliation. Not even Emilia's hot johnnycake, which we all loved, could break up the strained atmosphere in the living room. Guilt weighing heavily upon me, I was the only one at the table who kept mute. Emilia sulked, Kent was so choked with wrath that the words broke up in his throat, and without mentioning me by name Jim kept repeating aloud:

"Damn it all, there hain't no use tryin' to teach an ignorant man things he ain't fit to learn."

Neither Jim nor Kent would look at me, though on several occasions I sought to catch their eyes and convey to them with my own, which were shiny with tears, my heartfelt regrets for the catastrophe I had unwittingly caused. Fortunately we were all ravenously hungry and ate heartily, and by the time the meal was over Jim had recovered his good humor. As we arose from the table he said blithely:

"I told ye bees 's smarter than humans, and when ye do them a wrong they make ye remember it so ye won't never repeat it."

I was wondering if this gesture of reconciliation signified more than the passing of the man's rage. Would he permit me again to hive swarms and help him in other ways in the apiary? Above all, would he continue to instruct and delight me with stories of his observations and experiences with bees in the evenings as we sat on the porch or lay on the grass under the magnificent maple, with our eyes on the hives that were bringing their day's toil outdoors to a merry and peaceful end? With all my heart I hoped that he would. No story of the Evil One that I had ever heard in the old village had stirred me as had his tales and sermons on bees.

I was overjoyed, therefore, when the very next afternoon he sent for me to hive a fresh swarm.

"Ye've got to get over bein' scared of them," he said, "and this 's as good a time as any for ye to do it."

With trepidation I approached the apple tree on which the swarm had clustered. Jim watched me from a distance but said not a word. Resolved to retrieve myself in his esteem, I made no move without first thinking out all the details. I had the whole swarm covered by the top of the basket before I touched the limb. When I shook it gently, yet firmly, the cluster fell almost as neatly as though it were

a fruit. Not a vestige of panic and disorder followed. There was hardly an angry buzz on part of any of the bees, only the usual good-natured hum and bustle. I was stung once on the neck at a spot where the veil was untied, but the pain was not severe. When I saw the queen crawl inside the new hive, I gasped with pleasure. Now I knew the bees would be happy and all chance of catastrophe had passed. When I came out of the apiary, Jim said:

"I guess ye hain't as bad as I thought ye was. Ye're catchin' on pretty good."

I felt more triumphant than when I had mastered a machine on which I was set to work.

Jim had spoken to me so much about the honeymoon of the queen bee that I was eager for a chance to witness this momentous event in the life of the mistress of the hive. He promised to send for me next time he saw a queen and a pack of drones take off to the air. Shortly afterwards the dinner bell rang, and I ran to the house. When I arrived I saw Jim standing outside of the apiary with one hand over his eyes and gazing into space.

"Is it a honeymoon, Jim?" I asked eagerly.

"I should 've called ye sooner," he said, "but I wasn't so quick in gettin' here myself."

I too looked up but saw nothing. As if to make up for my disappointment, he proceeded to narrate the event he had called me to witness.

"The way them drones always start off so full o' noise and enthusiasm an' all of them so hopeful! But they hain't never had no experience with a queen, and they don't know what they're up against, how she'll keep on foolin' them, makin' now this one, now that one, think he's the only one she's ever cared for and the only one she'll take up with. I've seen it many a time, and always it's the same. The poor cusses don't know what in the world to make of her actions, 'cause she's smarter than they, the whole pack of them, and she makes them earn all the pleasure they get out of her, and she might 's well. After it's all over, the one she allows to cross her dies anyway—quite a price to pay for a little bit of pleasure, hain't it? So she keeps on flyin' an' teasin', and then she'll let one

o' them mate her, an' after that starts layin' eggs an' she don't care for no more males the rest of her life."

He paused, spat out a mouthful of tobacco juice, and went on a little bitterly:

"There's some women that hain't no better in their actions—use a man all they can, then quit him cold, as though they hain't never known him; and they hain't useful, neither, like the queen bee. Look out for such women, Maurice; they hain't a damned bit of good, hain't never done nobody nothin' but mischief, and I hain't talkin', neither."

There was more pathos than morality in Jim's final words, and I wondered if they were prompted by an unhappy remembrance. If he were a Russian I should have had no hesitancy in asking him why he had spoken so caustically of women, of whom the queen bee had reminded him. Had he known such women and suffered at their hands, and was the wound still smarting? But he was no Russian, his name was Jim Hoyt and he lived in Mount Brookville, and hadn't he concluded his denunciation with the words, "I hain't talkin', neither"?

One morning, as Jim and I were carrying a can of milk out of the cow stable to the stand on the highway, I saw on a hillock in the clover field back of the barn a fat little animal haunched on his hind legs, his head high in the air, as if straining to catch unwelcome sounds. I asked Jim what kind of an animal it was, and after one glance at the creature he spat with contempt and barked out:

"He's the damnedest galoot the Lord's inflicted on farm folk. We call him a woodchuck, and he hain't a damn bit of use to nobody 'cept himself, and all he does is tear up meadows and get fat on clover and cabbage."

"Is his fur any good?"

"No better than a rat's."

"And the meat?"

"Not for folks that's human. Round here nobody but Bill Young 's eatin' it, and he's half Indian, and he wouldn't be eatin' it if he wasn't too lazy to grub for a livin' like the rest of us."

Obviously Jim was an implacable enemy of woodchucks. Never-

theless my curiosity was stirred. I had never seen or heard of the animal, and now, walking slowly so as not to frighten him, I sought to get close and examine him. Suddenly he dropped on all fours and scampered off the hillock, and presently he was again up on his hind haunches. With the sun upon him I could see him clearly. Small, fat, with a short bushy tail and rich brown fur, he seemed in his motionlessness like a little stuffed sack. His feet were black, and there was a spatter of white in his face and on his exposed throat. Cautious as he was, he seemed not too fearful of man, for as long as I stood still he remained on his haunches. Had I had a rifle I could have shot him with ease. Only when I took a step forward did he waddle off again, this time into his hole.

On coming close I discovered he had shrewdly protected himself against attack by having an extra hole for flight or entrance. Now I understood the reason for Jim's angry contempt of the creature. The ridge of dirt and the pebbles and sand in the heart of the clover field would do the mowing machine no good, and the holes were large enough for an unwary horse to catch his foot and perhaps break his leg. I peered into one hole and then into the other, but saw nothing except a path of gravel and dirt strewn with stray stalks of grass and lost in darkness. I poked a stick inside and touched only ground. The holes then were deep and zigzagged their way to the bottom. I hunted around the entire clover field and discovered half a dozen more woodchuck lairs. More than ever did I appreciate Jim's enmity for the animal, and to surprise Jim I decided that I would clear the clover of every last one of them.

I invited Kent to co-operate in the venture, but scornfully he refused to have anything to do with woodchucks. Exterminating them was no job for a hired man, anyway, and as for the sport it afforded, he would rather lie on the grass under the maple and look at the moon. He suggested that I ask Bill Young's help, for Bill would rather spend his time hunting woodchucks than hoeing corn, and he would be only too happy to help. Besides, Bill had a lot of steel traps, specialized in collecting them, and knew, as much as anyone, the best way to set them in woodchuck holes.

Bill Young lived directly across the way from Jim's, and I had no sooner expressed my wish to hunt woodchucks than he ran into the barn and returned with an armful of clanking steel traps. Hur-

riedly and with enthusiasm he proceeded to explain to me how to set them—the trick being to ram up the hole with rocks on either side of the trap so that the woodchuck would have no other choice but to make his exit or entrance straight over the spring. When I left with a supply of traps, Bill admonished me: in the event that I caught a woodchuck I was not to kill him with a club but to call Bill and he would go down with his dog, and the dog would do the killing. The dog was just learning to hunt woodchucks and needed all the experience he could get. Besides, Bill wanted to make sure the meat was absolutely fresh so it would make "good eatin'."

The next morning there was a woodchuck in one of my traps, and I ran to tell Bill. We hurried down the field with the dog, who barked with glee, as if in anticipation of an exciting battle. It took no little shouting and scolding on Bill's part to keep the dog from diving his head into the hole. Quickly enough Bill pulled out the trap by the chain and, with the woodchuck suspended on it, flung it on the grass for the dog to do the rest. To my amazement, the woodchuck, though bound by one leg to the steel trap, immediately reared up and gnashed and rattled his long sharp teeth and made the dog jump back and yelp with wrath. It was clear that, small as he was and fat and chubby as he seemed, the woodchuck would not give up his life without desperate combat nor without inflicting brutal punishment on the dog. Rather than to witness the fight, I suggested to Bill that he end the animal's life with a club. But Bill wouldn't hear of it. The dog had to get his experience and kill the woodchuck with his teeth. Again and again the two plunged their fangs into each other and hung on each other, and usually it was the dog who was first to break loose. Try as hard as he might, he couldn't seize the woodchuck by the neck, at which he was aiming. In spite of the dog's immense handicap of size and freedom of movement, the woodchuck attacked with his head and fought with his teeth every time the dog approached. Only when the woodchuck was worn out did the dog achieve his aim. With his teeth firmly in the woodchuck's neck, he shook him savagely again and again and brought his brave life to an end.

As we were walking up the road, Bill swinging the dead animal by its tail, he said:

"You'd better come over later and taste a piece of the meat. It's

better than chicken, and don't let Jim tell you it ain't. The old codger don't know nothin' about it, 'cause he hain't never tasted woodchuck meat in his life. I offered him a piece once so he could see what a rotten liar he was, but he hain't never touched it."

Clearly Jim and Bill were not on terms of neighborly comradeship.

I had trapped half a dozen woodchucks in the clover field, and Jim was quick with praise, especially since no hired man he had ever had would bother with traps and woodchucks and he himself was too old to do the job. Bill too was elated, for he let his dog kill every one and then feasted on the meat.

One morning, as I was hoeing corn, Bill came over with a basket in which he had three baby woodchucks.

"Just got them on the knoll in Jim's meadow, and I'm goin' to tame them and make pets of them. Their mother's still in the hole, and I'm goin' to get her and eat her for supper."

After putting the young woodchucks away in a large box under his barn, Bill went up the knoll and set a trap for the mother woodchuck. But she managed to spring it without getting herself caught. Bill reset the trap, but with no better results. He kept on setting it day after day, and every time he came to look at it he found it snapped, with only a few furry hairs sticking out of the clamps. Dismayed and enraged at the woodchuck for persistently outwitting him, he came over to me and said:

"I'm goin' to drown out the bitch, see if I don't. Want to come and help?"

In the evening, when chores were finished, Bill and I went up the hill with pails. We carried endless quantities of water from the creek to the hole and poured it inside, and still there was no sight of the woodchuck. We continued carrying water, and finally Bill could touch her with a stick. Encouraged by the results, we fetched more and more water, and the wary woodchuck kept moving higher and higher to escape the rising flood. The sheer courage and coolheadedness of the animal was astounding. Finally, at Bill's command the dog dove his head into the hole and, leaping back with a whine, he dragged out the captive woodchuck with his teeth and instantly dropped her on the grass. So deep were the bites on the dog's ears, jaws and nose that he bled profusely, but the punish-

ment only aroused his fighting spirit, and with fresh whines and yelps he danced and leaped all around the woodchuck, sparring for a chance to seize her by the neck. Yet, whatever the direction from which he approached her, he found her large white teeth rattling and snarling and keeping him at a distance. Now and then they clinched and bit each other savagely, and invariably it was the dog that whined with pain and sought to break away, thus allowing the woodchuck to maneuver herself back a few inches toward the hole. What she should have done had she finally backed all the way to the hole when it was so flooded, she no doubt had not even bothered to think about. But that was her strategy—to fight back with her teeth and to draw nearer and nearer to the hole. Bill spoke with appreciation of her cleverness and kept urging the dog to seize her by the neck and finish her. The dog was willing enough, and the woodchuck was determined to stop him. Finally the dog seemed so tired that he sat down on his hind haunches, his mouth wide open, his tongue hanging out, panting hard and his eyes fixed gimletlike on the adversary. The woodchuck edged a few more inches toward the hole and kept her eyes fixed on the dog no less fiercely than the dog kept his on her. Both were dripping with blood and seemed eager for rest. Only Bill was impatient, and presently he urged the dog to renew the fight and not to allow the woodchuck to scare him. Fortified with fresh strength, the dog made a wild leap, and this time superior speed favored him. Seizing the woodchuck by the neck, he shook her violently again and again and then dropped her on the grass. With her bones broken and with death clutching at her very breath, she could no longer rear on her hind haunches, and yet she bravely lifted her head and continued hopelessly to gnash and rattle her teeth.

For me the experience was shattering. I couldn't help recounting to myself the enormous hazards and handicaps that the animal had had to face. She had sprung the trap about half a dozen times. Though the water had kept pouring into her hole, she wouldn't come out. She had moved with the rise of the flood and no higher. Never had she grown panicky and reckless and jumped out in a mad rush for safety, as might other animals or even human beings when face to face with the threat of death. She had taken her chances underground as long and as stubbornly as she could, and

when open battle with a bigger and stronger enemy was no longer avoidable she had stood up with a courage and a shrewdness that brought loud praise even from Bill. Her young were taken from her, and now that she was alone she had fought superbly for every minute and every second of her life. Considering the handicap of her physical equipment—her short legs, her small size, her fat waddling body and the fact that she had only her teeth to fight with—hers was by far the greater heroism.

When I saw Jim I told him of the battle I had just witnessed.

"Their courage," he said sourly, "is the only damn thing in their favor, and why in damnation the good Lord's seen fit to give so much of it to such good-for-nothin' pests 's more than any preacher can explain."

That was the last woodchuck I ever hunted.

My health was so good now that I forgot I had been ill. I could outbox Kent, and in our wrestling matches in the barn on rainy days I gave a good enough account of myself so that when we got into a dispute and he grew angry he ceased threatening to "lick hell out of me." I could trot all the way from the Mount Brookville milk station to Jim's farm as fast as the horse, and I could chase after a runaway calf all over the hills and in the wooded swamp and be none the worse for the effort, and I never failed to bring the calf home. I was thriving on the farm, and not only physically.

One day I read in the newspaper that Dr Frank Rollins, who had been my principal at Stuyvesant High School in New York, had become an assistant commissioner of education in Albany. On the spur of the moment I wrote and asked him if my work at the high school would count toward entrance requirements at the State Agricultural College at Cornell. He replied that it would and expressed the hope that I would go ahead with my education. His letter spurred me to resume my studies immediately. More than ever I was determined to make farming my life work. I couldn't imagine myself ever wanting to live in the city and work there—no matter how much richer the financial gain than on the land. Since the Mount Brookville school was closed for the summer, I decided that I would go ahead and study by myself. French and German, for example, and English and history I could study with-

out the aid of a teacher. Jim advised me to wait until autumn, when school opened and the work on the farm was less arduous and I had more time to myself. But I saw no reason to delay. Sundays, with the exception of chores, I had the day to myself. Evenings I was likewise free, and then there were the periods of "hired man's weather," when, because of conditions outdoors, work in the field was impossible and there was nothing particularly pressing to do indoors. Little as I might accomplish through these desultory studies, it would, I thought, bring me a step closer to the realization of my eventual purpose.

Since I had brought few books from New York, I went one Sunday by train to the nearest city to buy them. I knew that I should find the bookshops closed, but it was the only day on which I could make the trip, and I thought that, as in New York, I might run into a secondhand dealer who might be open on Sunday. Luckily I met a man on the train who said he knew a bookman who lived in the basement in which he kept his shop, and since he seldom went anywhere I would be sure to find him at home, but I must not hesitate to knock hard at his door, because his hearing was faulty.

On arriving in the city I went at once to the given address and pounded vigorously at the door. Presently a white-haired man with a tangled white beard and with heavy spectacles, and dressed in a loose bathrobe and slippers, came out from behind rows of bookcases and opened it. I bought all the textbooks I needed, and after we had talked awhile and he learned of my intention to prepare myself for college, he asked if I liked reading books. I replied that I did, and with a springy step he went to a shelf and came back with an armful of books which he spread on a table for me to examine. I showed no special enthusiasm for any of them, and he picked out a volume, flourished it proudly before me and said that I must read it. I could have it for fifty cents. He would have given it to me if he could have afforded to give away books.

"It is the story of a boy who dreamed of a college education, only he failed—and why and how he failed makes great reading. I've read it many times, and if you don't like it when you finish it bring it back or send it by mail and I'll return your money."

The enthusiasm of the man overcame my indifference and I paid

him fifty cents. The book was Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure.*

I began reading it on the train. There were many words which I did not understand, and though I had been in the habit of never going on with any reading unless I looked up new words in the dictionary, I couldn't lay it aside. I marked the new words so that I could learn their definitions on my arrival home, but I was so engrossed with the story that I had little patience to bother with a dictionary. The descriptions of nature, the author's feeling of warmth for his characters, the spirit of melancholy that blew out of the pages like the fragrances off a graveyard, at once made me think of Turgenev. For over a week I could hardly wait for the day's work to end so that I could resume reading the novel. When I finished it I was as shaken and exalted as I ever was on reaching the end of a Turgenev story. On my next trip to the city I visited the same bookman and bought *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge.*

## CHAPTER XV

## *Jim*

Though sixty-seven years old and subject to frequent headaches and attacks of sciatica, Jim was a remarkably active man. He rose every morning about the same time that Kent and I did and milked five cows, always the same ones. Unless he was laid up in bed, which rarely happened, he wouldn't permit Kent or me to approach his milkers, not even when he was late, which likewise happened rarely. He was a firm believer in the theory of the same man for the same cows—it was easier, he said, on the man and on the cows, made the cows less nervous and less given to holding up their milk.

A superb gardener, no one in Mount Brookville could vie with him in the variety and excellence of the berries and vegetables he cultivated, and so proud was he of his garden that he would allow neither Kent nor me to go near it with rake or hoe. He did all the work himself—the planting, the hoeing, the hilling, the thinning, the picking. He preferred to work after sundown, and often when

chores were finished I would jump over the rail fence and watch him. The ease and grace with which he handled a hoe roused my envy. He was like an artist with a brush; every stroke counted—to round out a curve, clean up a smudge, heighten the brightness of the work before him. I was amazed at the number of vegetables he grew of which the old village never had heard—parsnips, for example, and lettuce, tomatoes, kohlrabi, cauliflower, red cabbage, parsley, squash, vegetable oysters.

Remembering the importance of cucumbers in the old home, I once asked him why he planted so few of them. He assured me that he would have more than we should care to eat. An anomalous answer, I thought. I could not imagine any farmer planting more cucumbers than his household would consume. Evidently in Mount Brookville they were not the delicacy that they were in the old village, and when I told Jim that boys there often gave them as gifts to their girl friends, he flashed incredulous eyes on me and bawled:

"Them girls of yourn must like gettin' bellyaches."

At first the words startled me; then I was amused and gave a loud laugh.

"Rooshian girls," he bawled again, "must be as tough as that there elm in the yard," and after a pause he added acidly, "Don't never give cucumbers to girls round here, or they hain't never goin' to do no sparkin' with ye. I hain't foolin', neither."

Jim did little of the heavy work on the farm. During haying and harvesting, if rain threatened, he would come out and help bunch hay and set up sheaves. He would not plow any more, because he could no longer cut a straight furrow, and he would not harrow any more, because he could not stand the dust. The work in the hopyards was likewise too strenuous for him. Often he came out to watch me work, and if he observed any irregularity he was quick to correct me, not always without a blast of castigation.

In his leisure hours he stayed in the house, sitting in the same thin-armed, thin-legged rocker, with a frayed gray cushion in the seat, and read. He subscribed to William Jennings Bryan's *The Commoner,* the country edition of the New York *World,* the Democratic daily in the nearest city, the Mount Brookville *Courier,*

the *American Agriculturist, Gleanings of Bee Culture.* Every publication he received he read from cover to cover, not only the news and editorials but the advertisements, of which he talked with as much gusto as of the editorial opinions, and of the events of the world. If ever he tired of journals and newspapers he turned to catalogues, above all to the heavy tomes from the Chicago mail-order houses. The pages devoted to clothes and tools he thumbed so assiduously that they turned brown. Once he showed me with pride a letter he had received from the manager of one of these houses, enclosing a check of twenty-seven cents which he had overpaid on an order, and inviting him to call should he ever get to Chicago. "They's honest folks in that store," he said. "They ain't like them New York hop buyers. I'll bet they're all Democrats—yes, sir, real Democrats."

One evening, as I was sitting at the table reading Hardy's *Jude the Obscure,* he came up, looked over my shoulder and said:

"What be ye readin'?"

I showed him the book. He had never heard of it or of its author.

"Interestin'?"

"Yes, very."

"Will ye let me look at it when ye's through so I can tell if yer taste in books 's any good?"

I told him he could read the book in the daytime while I was out in the field working. The next morning at breakfast I gave him the book. At milking time he told me he had read a hundred pages.

"Did you like it?"

"Middlin'!" was his laconic reply, and after a pause he said, "This man Hardy ain't as interestin' as some other writers."

"Who, for example?"

"Did ye ever hear of Mary J. Holmes?"

"No, I didn't."

"There's a writer for ye, a damn sight smarter than yer man Hardy. I'll let ye have one of her books if ye've got a mind to read it."

That evening after supper he brought out from his bedroom a small brown-covered copy of *Cameron Pride.*

"I've got a lot of her books, and I've read them all, but I guess I like this one best. Take it."

The reading of the novel was so easy that I did not have to look up words in the dictionary as I did with Hardy. In two evenings I finished it, and I gasped with astonishment. Neither in his outward manner nor in his speech did Jim betray the least vestige of sentimentality, yet here he was reveling in the most sentimental writing I had ever read.

In the morning, when he came down to help with the milking, I told him that I had finished reading *Cameron Pride*.

"Did ye like it?"

"Middlin'!" I said, using his own word and with no show of enthusiasm.

"Is that so?" He was markedly disappointed. "I guess," he said. "ye're too young to appreciate good books."

"But this is so sentimental."

"Hain't ye got no sentiment in ye?"

"Yes," I answered, and I wished to add, "But you never show any." Somehow the words didn't come out."

"If ye'd have any real sentiment in ye," he said, "ye won't be sayin' Mary J. Holmes ain't as good a writer as Hardy."

I was more puzzled than ever. Openly avowing a liking for sentiment and exulting in it in books, the man never showed a trace of it in his everyday life, either in speech or in act. He was a sturdy contrast to the people in the old village, who never read books but who, at weddings, christenings, funerals, leave-takings, any festive and important occasion, embraced and kissed one another with loud smacks, wailed and laughed and showered each other with tenderness, with commiseration, with abuse. I could no more imagine Jim embracing and kissing me as Blind Sergey and many other of our old neighbors did whenever I came home for a vacation, or when I left for America, than I could imagine myself embracing a cow. I was sure Jim would regard such an act as a mark of weakness, perhaps of indecency. Yet here he was chanting lofty praise to Mary J. Holmes. I asked him if he had ever cried.

"Cry? What in hell's the use of cryin'?"

"Did you cry or feel like crying when you read *Cameron Pride*—

say when Kate's baby dies or when she sees her husband on his deathbed?"

"No, I hain't cried. I hain't never cried in my life, and by Jesus I hain't a-goin' to, neither!"

Though explosive in temper and violent in speech, Jim's vocabulary was singularly void of sex allusions. His most common words of indignation and vituperation were "galoot," "yahoo," "blackleg," "blasted," "goddam," "hell," "tarnation," "by Jesus," "Christ Almighty," "by gum," used separately or in combinations. He loathed the phrase "son of a bitch," and when I asked him why, since all around farmers slung it about as freely as they spat tobacco juice, he flung out cuttingly:

"That hain't no insult, except to the bitch. I hain't often been without a dog, and I'd a damn sight quicker be the son of some of the bitches I've had than of some of the women I've known. I hain't talkin', neither."

The words almost stunned me, not only because of what they revealed but because of what they concealed. They moved me to endless speculation. Once more I sensed tragedy in Jim's life that still rankled, and again I couldn't help thinking that if he were a Russian I should have felt free to draw the story out of him. But if he were Russian he never would have said, "I hain't talkin', neither," and if he had, he would have forgotten it in the presence of an eager listener. I followed him with my eyes as he proceeded to the feedbox to scoop out grain for the cows, and I wondered whether I ought to say something, a word of surprise, sympathy or consolation. But his set face and rotating mouth summarily killed all desire for comment on his last words. No, I couldn't understand Jim's conception of the word "sentiment"!

Once he and I were in the stable getting ready for milking. I was pitching hay from the mow, and he was shaking and distributing it in the mangers. A stranger came in and asked if he could get something to eat. Hoboes frequently stopped at the barn and house and asked for food.

"Ye can," Jim answered coldly, and continued shaking and dis-

tributing the hay. Either because he was very hungry or tired of waiting, the hobo said:

"Can I get it now?"

"No, not now," Jim answered, again coldly.

"Why not?"

Without looking at the man, Jim said:

"Ye've got to chop wood first for an hour."

"Can I get the food first and chop the wood afterwards?"

"Ye cannot."

"Why not?"

"Because ye'd run away and wouldn't chop the wood."

"Supposin' I promise I would?"

"I wouldn't believe ye."

The hobo flew into a rage.

"You lousy ——— bastard," he shouted.

Purple with rage, Jim started after him with the pitchfork. The hobo made a quick exit, and Jim dashed in pursuit. Faster on his feet than Jim, the hobo leaped over the barnyard gate, dove into the road and sprinted away, still yelling at the top of his voice the insulting words. Dropping the pitchfork, Jim picked up a rock and threw it after the fleeing man with such force that he reeled forward and nearly fell to the ground. Swearing and shouting, he returned to the barn.

"Ye goddam skunk, ye rotten old yahoo, ye blasted galoot!" he continued, as though the man were standing before him. I had never seen him so violently shaken. It seemed as if the hobo's insult had exploded a volcano of wrath in him. When his emotions had subsided, I said:

"Gosh, Jim, I've never known you to get so heated up about anything."

"He hain't no right to use *that* word."

Innocently enough I said:

"What word?"

"*That* word," he hurled back fiercely. "I'd have stuck the pitchfork through his guts if he hadn't run away, the damned galoot."

"But other farmers——"

"Other farmers can go to hell, 's far as I'm concerned."

After he had calmed down, I asked once more:

"Why do you dislike *that* word so much?"

"'Cause," he answered savagely, "things that's private hain't needed to be shouted in public."

Neither he nor I ever again alluded to the subject.

I had never heard of shortcake until I got to Jim's, and Kent, who had a passion for desserts, assured me that he never had known a woman who baked better shortcake than Emilia. When fresh strawberries were gone, Emilia stopped serving it. She would not use canned berries, because they did not make as good shortcake as fresh ones. Then, one day, I learned that the raspberries of one of our neighbors had ripened, and I hinted to Jim that I should not be averse to making a raid on them after dark. An old hand at stealing fruit from orchards, I was sure Jim would be only too pleased with my proposal, because he reveled in Emilia's shortcake no less than I did. I had no more than finished my words when he thundered out:

"By Jesus, man, if ye be wantin' to be a thief, ye can scoot right off these here premises 'fore I take a pitchfork and kick ye off."

"I only meant——" I hastened to apologize, but he wouldn't let me proceed with my words.

"I don't give a damn what ye be meanin'! We's honest folks in this country."

I was more than remorse-stricken. Obviously Jim and Mount Brookville had forged a code of personal honesty which, with the exception of a few honorable citizens, the old village had never achieved. There young people had come to regard the stealing of fruit and vegetables from a neighbor's orchard or garden as an exciting adventure, almost a right. Often enough, when a man passed a neighbor's oatfield in the night, he stole a sheaf of grain and fed it to his horse right there on the road. People slept in their orchards and gardens and kept surly dogs tied to posts by a chain or rope and taunted them into biting strangers, all in a determined effort to frighten off would-be intruders. I should have thought of the ways of Mount Brookville before thinking of a raid on a neighbor's raspberry bushes.

In Mount Brookville nobody locked barns or houses. Jim never even put a lock on the feedbox or the grain bins. Nobody bothered

to sleep in gardens or orchards, and nobody ever thought of chaining a dog to a post and taunting him into meanness. Boys and girls never sneaked into their father's granary at night to fill their pockets and bosoms with corn, oats, wheat to exchange at the store for the delicacies they craved. Cows and horses were left in the pasture to browse at will, and nobody needed to watch them, except when a fence broke, and then for no longer a time than it took to mend the broken part; and yet, not since the round-up of the Loomis gang had there been thefts of livestock. When a man found a calf on his land that did not belong to him and he did not know whose it was, he sent word to the milk station and to the store, giving a full description of its appearance, and when the owner arrived he gladly returned it without charging a cent for the trouble he might have had in looking after it. Not even the springs in which farmers cooled their milk during the night were locked, and nobody ever hesitated to set out milk cans on stands on the open highway for the teams to pick up and haul to the station. Nor did anyone ever bother to lock his rural delivery box, and yet no farmer ever lost as much as the wrapper of a seed catalogue!

Such impeccable personal honesty, as much a part of the character of the people as were the hemlock and the basswood of its wooded hills, was to me the most extraordinary reality in the civilization of Mount Brookville. Of course the pressure of poverty was nowhere as acute as in the old village. Everybody was always short of cash, but there was an abundance of grass and water for livestock, of fruits and vegetables for people, and stealing a cucumber or an apple or a basketful of grass, cut with a sickle in a neighbor's meadow, afforded neither gain nor adventure.

Jim would not even pour a saucerful of cream from the night's can of milk, because, as he once told Kent, who argued that other farmers didn't mind doing it, he was selling the milk as it came from the cow "without any humans messin' with it."

I had learned enough about hoeing to know that the important thing was to tear up the weeds by the roots and bury them in dirt so they would choke to death, or to leave the roots exposed in the sun so they would dry up and die. One day Jim sent me to hoe

a cornfield, and to my amazement I struck a grass of coarser fiber than any I had seen, with roots so deep that, no matter how far I dug into the earth, I could not reach their ends. Afraid of undermining the plants, I went to the house and asked Jim to come out and tell me what was wrong with my hoeing or with the mysterious grass.

"Hain't ye never seen it b'fore?" he said, after a glance at the weed.

"Never, what is it?"

"Well, sir, I'll tell ye. Ye dig up this grass by the roots, dry it in the sun, set fire to it, burn it to ashes, then scatter the ashes on the land and it'll grow again."

I gave a laugh, but Jim was serious; in fact his emotion was gathering momentum, and I half expected an explosion.

"I hain't foolin', neither," he resumed with a rising inflection, "it's the goddamnedest thing a farmer's got on his land. We call it quack, and we hain't never had much of it until the Republican party got into power."

When Jim talked of politics (and he never missed a chance if only there was something to remind him of it), he could not help being aroused. For politics was the consuming passion of his life. He never went to church and never read the Bible. He poohpoohed the idea of a Satan seeking to ensnare man into sin and of the need of man with the help of the Lord constantly to battle against the whisperings of the Devil. He had no use for abstractions or for mystical concepts of good and evil. He had his own symbols of both. The Democrats were the forces of good in the world, the Republicans the forces of evil, and William Jennings Bryan was the high priest of the Democrats, while the Republicans never could and never would have a high priest.

Once, as we were eating lunch, there was a timid knock at the door.

"You better go and see who it is," said Emilia, turning to Jim.

Without waiting to swallow his mouthful of food, he stepped out on the porch. I sat beside the window that looked out on the porch and, turning, I saw a disheveled little man, bareheaded and in dilapidated shoes.

"Can I get something to eat, mister?" said the man.

Jim bolted his food, scrutinized the man sharply and said invitingly:

"Well, sir, I might give ye a mess of vittles if ye're a mind to answer a question."

"What's the question?" asked the little man.

"Be ye a Democrat or a Republican?"

Kent gave a laugh and so did I, and the little man heard us through the open window, and after casting a glance at us he quickly replied:

"A Republican!"

Jim's face grew purple. Slamming the door on the man, he shouted:

"Ye goddam galoot, get the hell off my premises. I hain't never fed a Republican in my life, not 's I'd known it, and I'll be blasted if I'm a-goin' to start now.

"The nerve of the galoot," he snarled as he returned to the table, "a Republican and askin' me for a mess of vittles!"

I glanced at the picture of Bryan on the rear wall, and it seemed to me that his smile was broader and his eyes brighter than I had ever seen them.

When the two-year-old heifer, whose bovine curiosity had frightened me on my first day on the farm into kicking her in the shanks, had freshened, Jim asked me to break her into milking. The unpleasant memory of my first encounter with her, together with her formidable size and strength and her flagrant nervousness, impelled me to decline the request. Thereupon Jim proceeded to do the job himself. Careful as always with new milkers, he sat down slowly, caressed the heifer's flanks and back and murmured soothingly, "So bossie, so bossie." Then he started milking her. The mess of grain which she was lustily devouring kept her so preoccupied that she was hardly aware of Jim's manipulations, and she moved only when she reached out with her tongue for the last spatterings of the oil-meal mixture in the corners and on the sides of the manger. When there was no more feed to lick, she poked her head through the stanchion and stared wildly and then began to shift around protestingly. But Jim was used to the protests of spirited heifers whom he was breaking into milking. With quick hands and gentle words he kept this one from getting unduly

excited and pugnacious. Finally she calmed down and stood still, as though she had long been accustomed to Jim and his wiry and swift-moving fingers. He had almost finished milking her, had in fact got down to the stripping, when the barn cat made a dive from the haymow to the floor. So frightened did the heifer become that she gave a wild jump and, finding Jim's pail in the way, she kicked it violently, first with one leg, then with both, spilling it over Jim's head and drenching him. Though he had cautioned me again and again never to utter a loud word in the presence of a cow, as it might make her hold up and even shrink on her milk, nor to lay a hand on her except in a caress, the ignominy which he had just suffered aroused him beyond control. Head and face dripping with milk, he seized the milk stool with both hands, hit the cow on the flanks and shouted with all the hate that he could muster:

"Stand still, ye goddam Republican!"

It was my turn now to speak up for the rights of the cow. Snatching the milk stool from Jim's hands, I led him out of the stable and ordered him to go to the creek and wash himself. He made no protest, and on the way to the creek and while washing the milk off his face and head he kept up a barrage of imprecations on the Republicans who had gotten so powerful in the world that they were ruining the disposition of young Holstein cows!

"Why in tarnation don't yer Rooshian peasants," he once said to me, "get together and kick that damned galoot of a Czar off his throne and to hell?"

"Maybe someday they'll do just that," I answered.

"They sure ought to," Jim went on with fervor. "He hain't doin' the common man no good, but I tell ye, fellow, they could do much worse, a horrible sight worse, if they'd ever let the Republicans take his place."

At election time Jim was up in arms all his waking hours. If only the farmers in the country would get some sense and vote the Democratic ticket! If only once for all they'd chase the blackleg Republicans into the swamp and make them stay there until they got sobered into becoming Democrats!

But no swearing, no vituperation, no supplication ever did any

good. The Republicans always won, and Jim saw the world on the verge of collapse, and himself forsaken by man and God.

Jim was as headstrong about business as he was about politics. Business—his business, every farmer's business—was bad, he vowed, because the politics of the county were in a doleful mess. Yet he seldom talked of business. In fact while he himself, with his incessant denunciation of Republicans, initiated me into his rebellion in politics, of his rebellion in business I learned from others. I slowly came to recognize a state of affairs that boded ill for Jim and for those who depended on him.

The first time I carried the milk to the station I got acquainted with the man who drove up immediately behind me and waited as I did his turn to unload the cans and get the milk weighed. A handsome man with grayish locks falling from under his cap and a twinkle in his eyes, he turned to me and said:

"D'you like workin' for Jim?"

"I like it fine," I answered.

Then, with a mischievous toss of his head, he said:

"He hain't sold his hops yet, has he?" and burst into an exultant chuckle.

Another farmer, who had drawn up behind my interlocutor, volunteered a pungent answer:

"Hell, no, and he hain't agoin' to sell them, neither, until they hain't worth no more than sawdust."

Again the handsome man chuckled, and I resented his amusement at the expense of Jim, but I said nothing.

Some time afterward, I stopped in the store to buy groceries for Emilia. Leaning against the back of a chair with his fingers interlaced behind his head sat an elderly man, his cap low over his head and his face as wrinkled as a sheep's wool, with not a smooth patch of skin anywhere. He was energetically chewing tobacco and frequently emptied his mouth with a loud squirt into a near-by container.

"You Jim's new hired man?" he asked after I greeted him with a howdy.

"Yes, sir."

"Jim hain't sold his hops yet, has he?"

"I don't know," I answered.

He didn't chuckle or in any other way manifest gloating satisfaction. Rather he seemed concerned. With a nod of commiseration he soon added:

"He hain't ought to do that. It hain't fair on himself. He should've sold his hops same as other folks, soon after he's got them dried and baled. There hain't no use keepin' the damn thing until it hain't worth nothin'."

Weeks later, as I was driving home from the store, our German neighbor, Heinrich, caught up with me, and after we had talked for a few minutes he too pounced on me with the question:

"Has Jim sold his hops?" and like the handsome man at the station he broke into a gloating chuckle.

This time I was disconcerted. I had grown attached to Jim, and it displeased me to hear people poke fun at him because he hadn't sold his hops. On my arrival at the farm, after I got the horse unhitched and unharnessed and tied to the manger in the barn, I walked into the hophouse, where Jim was putting together a fresh supply of beehive fixtures, and said to him:

"Jim, it's kind of funny, folks are always asking me if you've sold your hops."

With a snort he lifted the heavy spectacles from his nose and fixed his bulging eyes on me in the manner of a man who didn't resent the question but had an impassioned answer to make. After splashing out a mouthful of tobacco juice he said vehemently:

"The goddam fools—if they was all doin' it we wouldn't need to give away the crop for anythin' the city blacklegs've got a mind to give us. We'd get real money. If this was a Democrat county folks would have sense enough to know it. But they's all Republicans, so what can ye expect?"

"Don't you lose money in the long run?"

"I lose it anyway." After a protracted silence he added, "No, sir, I hain't goin' to sell my hops until prices's right. I might's well bed the pigs with them as give 'em away at Republican prices."

I sensed both comedy and tragedy in Jim's words and in the things I had heard about him, and that evening, when Kent and I were by ourselves in our room upstairs, I said:

"Kent, do people ask you too if Jim's sold his hops?"

"They sure do, 'cause he's always waitin' for higher prices, and the longer he waits the lower prices get, and then he waits for prices to get where they was, and they jest don't. They get still lower."

To me this was sad news. I had worked in the hopyard, had set the poles, grubbed the hills, plowed and cultivated the rows and tied the vines, and I knew that no crop was more strenuous or more expensive to cultivate. Next to milk it was the only cash crop Jim had, and here he was missing out on the best prices.

"It's too bad, isn't it?" I said sorrowfully.

"Of course it's too bad, but there's nothin' nobody can do about it."

Evidently the subject was an old source of annoyance to Kent, for he launched into a tirade against Jim:

"That's why we don't never get no eggs for breakfast. Emilia's got to sell every egg the hens lay so's she can pay for groceries. And that's why we hain't never been eatin' butter, neither, like other folks, nor drinkin' milk with our vittles, not a drop, except in milk gravy and corn mush. I'm beginnin' to get sick of it, by gum I am. I know places where they's always eatin' eggs and butter and drinkin' all the milk they want, and every mornin' for breakfast they're havin' oatmeal with sugar and cream, and if Jim 'd ever sold his hops on time we'd have as good vittles 's anybody, and Emilia could sure cook them."

To me Kent's complaint of our food was unjustified. True, we ate no eggs, no butter, no milk, no oatmeal, but never in my life had I sat at as sumptuous and appetizing a table as at Jim's. We always had pork, salted beef, delicious breads which Emilia baked. Before the garden began supplying us with produce we ate home-canned vegetables and fruits. Emilia's griddle cakes and johnny-cake, like her pies, doughnuts, shortcake, molasses cookies and corn mush, delighted even Kent, and Jim never stinted on his buckwheat honey. No, I couldn't agree with Kent that Jim's table wasn't as good as that of other folks. Still I was perplexed and worried about Jim.

Now and then at the table I would hear Emilia hint to him that he had better sell his hops before the new crop was harvested, and stubbornly he would reply he wasn't goin' t' give them away

for "no damn Republican price." It was clear now that there was conflict between Emilia and Jim over the hops, though with her modesty and politeness she never disclosed in Kent's presence or mine the grief that Jim's stubbornness had caused her. I knew Jim owed a heavy feed bill and was not in particularly good standing with the town merchants and was having trouble now and then with the man who held a mortgage on his farm. But Jim stuck to his guns. He would rather be a rebel than a success.

I was supposed to get my wages at the time that Jim received his monthly milk check. But three months had elapsed, and I had received only five dollars, though I had asked for no more than ten. Jim assured me that he would pay me in the fall, after he had picked his hops, though Kent kept warning me not to depend on his word, because it "hain't in his blood to sell hops when other folks 's sellin' theirs."

My shoes were going to pieces, and I asked Jim if I could have money to buy a new pair. He looked at my shoes and shook his head. "Why in hell hain't ye thought of buyin' them b'fore? No man should let shoes fall off his feet like ye've done." I was sure he would give me the money. Instead he said: "Ye go down the store, pick yerself a nice pair of shoes—the Jeff Hurd's the best—and tell Fred ye'll pay him when I get my next milk check."

"You're sure he'll trust me that long?"

"Of course he will."

I drove to the store and picked out a pair of work shoes that seemed as if made for me. I asked Fred whether I could take them on credit until Jim got his next milk check. Fred made a wry face, and I at once knew that Jim's standing with him was not as high as Jim had imagined.

"Damn the fool," he burst out, "if he'd ever sell his hops he could pay his bills on time like other folks."

"Supposin'," I said, "I promise to pay you for the shoes? I've got to have them; look at how worn my old ones are."

"Go ahead, take them," said Fred with not a particle of enthusiasm.

I threw off the old shoes and strutted around the floor in the new ones to make sure there was nothing wrong with the fit. With pride Fred said:

"There hain't no better work shoes made anywhere in the country. I wear them myself—see?"

He escorted me to the door, and as I was getting into the wagon he said with concern:

"It hain't none of my business, young feller, but if I was you I'd make Jim pay me every month and not wait until fall, when he's sold his hops. He hain't never yet sold them on time."

I drove home, and on the way I felt depressed. It seemed as though the whole world were in arms against Jim. Of course he was a wretched businessman. The mere notion that he alone, with his score of bales of hops, could control the price was ludicrous. In the absence of a united effort of all hopgrowers in the region, his lone attempt to fight the market could only result in grief for himself and for those who depended on him. But whose affair was it whether he was a good or a bad businessman? He suffered the penalty. There was folly in the man, but also heroism. He made me think of my own father, though Father was even more wretched a businessman than he and had none of his fighting spirit. Father always ran from trouble, while Jim, his eyes bulging, his mouth rotating fiercely, never hesitated to bellow his protest against those who confronted him with trouble, and woe to the man who sought to shake him out of deep-souled allegiances, whether to William Jennings Bryan or to his timber lot in the swamp. His tongue could be as sharp as Bill Young's double-edged axe and cut as deeply.

One evening, as he and I were leaning on the fence and talking, a buggy hitched to two spirited gray horses drove up. A man in a wide-rimmed panama hat and shirt sleeves leaned out and said:

"Are you Jim Hoyt?"

"Yes, sir, Jim Hoyt is my name."

"That's a fine piece of timber you've got in the swamp."

"There hain't none finer."

"I'd like to buy it."

"Ye can't."

"Why not?"

"I hain't sellin' it."

"Don't you need money?"

"There hain't nothin' I need worse."

"I'll pay you cash."

Jim's mouth was beginning to rotate fast, a sure sign of gathering fury.

"Ye hain't got enough cash, by Jesus."

The man gave a laugh and said:

"I'll write to Rockefeller and get him to supply the cash."

"He hain't got enough, neither."

Piqued by the reply, the man said, a little sharply:

"You must like to look at them pines of yours."

"There hain't nothin' I like to look at more."

"So you won't sell it?" the man asked again.

"No," Jim shouted, "and I don't think a hell of a lot of folks that's always wantin' to cut down trees."

Laughing maliciously, the man drove away, and as Jim watched the buggy make a turn in the road, the gleam in his eyes sharpened and his jaws flew up and down like the pistons of an engine.

"By Jesus," he shouted again, "all them city galoots wants nowadays is to tear up and cut down and destroy everythin' they see in the country, so's they can make easy money. They'd dry up the river in the swamp if they could make a nickel out of it. There hain't nothin' they got respect for no more. I'd as soon let a man cut them fine pine and cedar off my land as cut my throat—a damned sight sooner." He would, too.

Perhaps it was because Jim had such infinite courage that, like my father, he never gave up hope of fortune turning his way. If he held his hops long enough, they would go up in price—next month, the month after, the year after. The rains would come, would have to come, and drench the parched longings of his heart. Life couldn't be so cruel as to withhold the rains forever, and both Jim and my father believed in life. Micawbers, both of them, they were eternally waiting for a miracle to retrieve them from trouble and adversity. Father died with faith in this miracle undimmed, and I wondered about Jim.

## CHAPTER XVI

## *Neighbors*

EXCEPTING FOR THE CLATTER of an occasional railroad train and the crash of thunder during a storm, the countryside in Mount Brookville was idyllic in its peace and calm. It was so quiet that during the day, while working in the hopyards on the hill or in meadows in the valley, I could hear, far away, neighbors shouting at their horses. The bark of a dog chasing an animal in the wooded swamp echoed resoundingly over the hills and evoked melancholy remembrances of the old village and of the wild dogs that roamed in the near-by forest. Evenings, save for the wail of an owl, the chirping of crickets drowned all other sounds. Here were life, movement, struggle; yet none of the brash noises of the city.

The people partook of the tranquillity of nature. They lived in isolated homesteads, sometimes out of sight of neighbors. They retired early and woke with the birds. They never hurried and, save for a few hot-tempered souls like Jim, were not given to heated and disputatious talk. They had their grievances against each other and even more against the New York milk dealers. They might be devoted church members and deem it a sin to invoke the name of the Lord in vain, yet when aroused they gave vent to blasts of profanity which betrayed utter unconcern for the will of the Lord. Always sure of themselves, they knew little inward turmoil. Their pattern of living was as clearly marked out as the roads over which they traveled. They did not need to grope for fresh directions. They knew what lay ahead and how to meet the social emergencies which their civilization imposed on them. Having grown into the decorum of the country, they neither questioned its meaning nor deviated seriously from its prescribed standards. Like the tree in the earth, they sensed no conflict between themselves and their surroundings.

Not so with me. Because the work and the folkways were new, I could take nothing for granted. Not a day but I was aware of problems, conflicts, adjustments that challenged and overwhelmed

me. I had but little inward calm and was therefore saved from boredom. The longer I stayed at Jim's, the more immense was the horizon that unfolded before me and the more eager I was to encompass with mind and heart its vast expanse.

I had done well with "the hang of things" on the land and in the barns. I had explored the country. Evenings and Sundays I wandered at will over the hills and valleys. The undulating hopyards, the swaying cornfields, the groves of maple and elm, of beech and hemlock, of spruce and basswood on the uplands and the vista of pine and cedar in the nine-mile swamp were an endless source of rapture. The gurgling river with clusters of pussy willows rising from its dark green waters was always a beacon and a refuge. If ever I got lost, I would search for its gleaming surface, and after hours of wading and bounding through the grassy bogs, it was refreshing to sit on a log and splash hot feet in its cool waters.

Still, save for the immediate household of which I was a part, I had as yet learned little of the people in the country. Because of their sense of privacy and inward self-sufficiency, I was inordinately diffident lest I blurt out a question or venture an opinion which fitted neither the mood nor the proprieties of the occasion. Only when I felt a little sure of the new social idiom did I begin to visit neighbors freely, linger in their homes, listen to their talk and ask questions about themselves. Not one of them, however aloof he held from the outside world and however untroubled by financial difficulties, but loomed in time as the personification of a drama more or less heroic, and always with a significance of its own.

Here, for example, was Art Kendal. He was one of our nearest neighbors and lived in an old and spacious house at a point where the turnpike met the main highway. On one side it faced a wooded hill, on the other a field which fell abruptly into the nine-mile swamp. A widower and the father of three children, most of the time Art lived alone. His youngest child was a daughter, and she spent months at a time with relatives; the other two were boys who were overcome with wanderlust. They were good workers, but they seldom stayed in one place longer than necessary to earn enough money for a suit of clothes or a gun. Then they wandered on, hunted, fished, explored the world. Art never knew when they would be coming home or when they would be leaving. After an

absence of several months they would drop in casually, say "Hello, Dad," and settle down sometimes for a whole month, sometimes for no longer than a day. "They hain't got no more homin' instin't than a wolf," I once heard Art say to Jim. They certainly never manifested any particular love of their home or any visible affection for their father. At first, on observing their casual relations with Art, I felt sorry for him. On coming or departing they never even bothered to shake hands, and I thought that deep in his soul Art suffered torment at this lack of outward devotion. But then Art never manifested any special warmth for them. "You here, son?" I heard him say once to Ed, the younger one, whom he found sitting on a chair on the porch. "Ya," answered Ed coolly. "Been here long?" Art asked again. "Not so long," Ed answered casually. That was the way they greeted each other. Not a word of affection; not a show of warmth. They might have been strangers for all that their demeanor signified.

There was nothing imposing about Art's outward appearance. Short, slender, with a bent back, large brown eyes, bushy brows and sloppy mustaches, he hardly lifted his feet as he walked, but scraped them along the earth. He worked part of his small farm—that is, he planted crops and then neglected them, and weeds sometimes choked out the plants. His chief source of income he derived from driving the school bus, and from working for others by the day during the busy seasons in the fields. He cooked his own meals and did all the other work in the house, including the washing.

"As a housekeeper," Jim once said, "Art ain't as good as one of my Poland Chinas."

Nor did Jim mean to be contemptuous. He liked Art and spoke well of him as a neighbor and as a man of his word. But Art would rather sit on the porch and smoke his pipe than sweep or scrub the floor or make his bed or wash his sweat-soaked shirts.

Art's greatest weaknesses were whisky and Emilia's pie, especially mince pie. He didn't often get drunk—he couldn't afford it—and when he did he went home and slept. Afterwards he wondered if his neighbors had seen him. A man who was driving the school bus was not supposed to get drunk. If Jim happened to say to him, "Art, ye hain't been so sober last night," he would proceed like a contrite child to lament his lack of self-control and swear at him-

self for having yielded to temptation. "I hain't been that way, Jim," I once heard him say, "in many a moon, and I hain't never goin' to go near the damned saloon again. You just wait and see, not another drop of whisky for Art Kendal, no sir!"

"Swearin' off?" Jim taunted.

"Kinda," Art answered, with weakening self-confidence.

"For how long?"

"Now, Jim, there hain't no use your doubtin' my word."

"No, sir, I hain't never doubted yer word," Jim flung back, "but I hain't never trusted yer appetite, neither." Then both men laughed.

Often enough Art managed to drop in at Jim's as if casually, about time we were having dessert. If Emilia served mince pie for supper, he would rub his hands with pleasure and assure her that he would never think of refusing an invitation to have a piece, for no woman he had ever known could bake "such grand mince pie." On finishing his piece he would deluge Emilia with compliments, and if she happened to say, "Won't you have another piece?" he would reply, "I really hain't ought to do that, Emilia, but I tell you there ain't no dessert in the world I like more than your mince pie." Yet, before helping himself to another piece, he would offer the plate first to Jim, and though Jim had often said that "pie hain't never done nobody's stomach 'ny good," he never demurred at a second helping. Indeed, Jim had to have his pie even when he was sick and would touch no other food. Art, of course, never cared what happened to his pie once it got inside of him.

Alonzo Evans, another neighbor, was as different from Art Kendal in appearance as he was in character. Tall, gangling, with a large head, long arms, broad shoulders, a singularly thin waistline and thin legs, he resembled a Mount Brookville elm with its trunk bare of limbs for some distance above ground and its top a mass of stalwart branches. The resemblance spread beyond physical shape, for like the local elm Alonzo was a tower of somber dignity. Like Art he barely lifted his feet off the ground when he walked, yet he would no more plan a call on a neighbor at mealtime, especially at the moment when dessert was served, than he would make advances to the man's wife. There was nothing that Alonzo

loathed more than to seek or to grant favors. Like the elm that he resembled, he had struck deep roots in the earth on which he had his being. "Mine is mine and yourn is yourn" was not only a code he espoused, but a precept he never violated.

Married, with his only child, a son, away from home, he and his wife, a singularly alert and courteous woman, lived by themselves and did all their own work. A mere glance at their house, with its fresh coat of white and green paint, and at their fields, as clean of weeds as their lawn was of debris, told the passer-by of the immense and loving care which they bestowed on their lands and on their buildings. "There hain't no better farmer in the county," Jim often said of Alonzo, and I never had known of anyone to take exception to this eulogy. All the more remarkable was the bountifulness of his crops, because his land was stony and rose steeply upward, so much so that when he walked up a field or drove with horse and wagon he frequently paused for breath. "Bill Young" (our neighbor across the way), said Jim, "would starve to death on a farm like that in no time."

The Evanses didn't bother to sell milk at the station—too much work for the money there was in it, and besides, why should they work their heads off making rich New Yorkers still richer? They kept a small dairy and churned butter of so high a quality that they never could keep up with the demands of immediate neighbors alone. They kept no dog; they didn't need one and didn't care to feed a "critter" for which they had no use. They kept hens and shipped eggs. They also grew hops. They raised their own meat, pork and beef, also all their vegetables and fruit, and not even Emilia stored away for the winter as many jars of pickles and berries as did Alonzo's wife. They made cider, which they sealed in bottles and kept sweet all winter. They abhorred hard cider and all fermented beverages. Not that they adhered to the temperance principles of a church. No one had ever seen them walk inside a church, any church, either for services or for an entertainment. But they believed in absolute abstemiousness. Jim vowed that he had never seen Alonzo, whom he had known since the day he was born, take a sip of beer or whisky. Nor did Alonzo indulge in tobacco, which always drew words of high praise from Emilia. Yet

neither Alonzo nor his wife ever denounced people who were addicted to the use of alcohol and tobacco. The precept of "Mine is mine and yourn is yourn" they extended beyond material possession to the ways and habits of others.

In all the time that I had lived with Jim, not once did the Evanses come over for a visit, and not once did any of us call on them. Nor did they visit other neighbors or invite them to their house. They might have lived on another planet for all the concern they showed for the people around them. Never had I heard of human beings who were so utterely bereft of curiosity in others or who seemed so happy in their aloneness. Alonzo had all his own tools and never needed to borrow from a neighbor, and if someone came to borrow a tool from him, it was either in use or broken or he never had bought it. Evenings in summer, I seldom saw a light in his house, for he and his wife retired at dark. Mornings, when I went to the pasture to bring home the cows, smoke was already curling out of their chimney. Their chief joy in life was work, and unless it rained hard they were always out in the field doing something, giving the corn or the potatoes one more stir with the hoe. They read neither books nor newspapers and subscribed only to the Mount Brookville *Courier* and to a poultry journal. Of course they received regularly the immense catalogues from the Chicago mail-order houses and bought most of their merchandise from them. They never went to town except when they needed groceries or feed for their livestock. On election day Alonzo drove to the polling place, voted the Republican ticket and promptly returned home. He did not care who was nominated for office and what the issues of the campaign were, local or national. When Jim once sought to persuade him to vote the Democratic ticket, he said he wasn't interested. The Republican party was good enough for him, and he didn't care who knew it. He had no more notion of swapping parties than of swapping wives. Jim went home swearing at the top of his voice and prophesying doom for all mankind.

In the old village people like the Evanses, who had deliberately cut themselves off from social intercourse with others, would have been regarded as pariahs or unfortunates or out of their minds.

I often wondered what it was that had made Alonzo so calloused

to the outside world. True, he had been reared in an environment of sturdy individualism. But so had Jim and Art and Bill, yet there was nothing of the hibernating animal about them. I asked Jim for an explanation. "I guess Alonzo was born that way," he answered. "Some folks don't give a damn about any humans 'cept themselves." But Bob Ferris was of a different opinion. Once I helped Bob cut his ensilage corn, and after lunch, as we were resting in the shade of a huge maple, we started talking about Alonzo. I told Bob what Jim had said about the reason for his hermitlike life, and he broke into a laugh.

"That ain't it at all," he said. "The trouble with Jim is he hain't never been fair to people who vote the Republican ticket, and Alonzo hain't never voted any other and hain't never goin' to, neither. I know Alonzo, and I'll tell you what's made him what he is. When he was a young man he ran a hop farm in Sennettville about ten miles from here. After he'd picked his hops, the man who had a mortgage on his farm asked him to sell and pay off the mortgage. But Alonzo wouldn't do it, 'cause folks love to gamble, and by the time he was ready to sell his hops, they weren't worth much. So the mortgage holder came along and sold him out—everything he had—and left him with nothing, not even a chicken, and Alonzo hain't never forgotten it. He was a good worker and got a job as a hired man and saved every nickel he made. When he had thirteen hundred dollars he came to look at the farm that he's got now. The man wanted fourteen hundred, and so Alonzo said he guessed he couldn't buy it. The man offered to give him a mortgage, and Alonzo perked right up and said, 'No, sir, you ain't goin' to do that, 'cause I ain't goin' to let you. I ain't never again goin' to let any man put a log chain round my neck.' So he went back and worked another year, and when he had enough cash he bought his farm, and he hain't never wanted to have much to do with other folks."

Afterwards, whenever I passed Alonzo's place, I could not help thinking of his experience with the mortgage holder and of how irretrievably the man had scorched his soul.

One Sunday morning, as I was passing Alonzo's house, I was surprised to see him beckon to me. When he came over he gave me an apple and asked if Kent and I would oblige him and come

with pitchforks the following afternoon after dinner and help him do his thrashing. Since I was only a hired man, I said that it was for Jim to say whether or not Kent and I could come. I suggested that he ride up with me and speak to Jim.

"Would you mind speaking to him?" he asked.

"Not at all, if you want me to."

"I'll appreciate if you do," and, waving his hand, he walked back to the house.

It was obvious that he didn't wish to put himself under obligation to Jim lest he be called upon at some time in the future to return the favor.

When I told Kent of Alonzo's request he beamed with joy.

"We sure 're goin'," he snapped out. "We'll tell Jim, and he won't say nothin'. He won't mind accommodatin' Alonzo, even if the old buzzard won't never vote the Democrat ticket. Jimminy Christmas, Maurice, you hain't never known vittles until you've sat at Mrs Evans' table. She sure stacks them high, the best she's got, and it don't make no difference whether it's mealtime when folks 's through thrashin', she feeds them anyway. Gee, what grand vittles she's got!" Kent glowed with triumph, and then of a sudden his expression darkened and he said:

"Of course Alonzo ain't much on payin' folks. He's an awful tightwad, 'd sooner cut his finger as let a nickel slip out o' his hand. But if we work all afternoon he'll pay us a dollar anyway, same as he'd have to pay if he hired men by the day. An' I sure can use an extree dollar, can't you?"

The next afternoon, immediately on finishing dinner Kent and I reported with pitchforks at Alonzo's barn. The thrashing machine and engine were already set and primed for work. A little apologetically Alonzo asked Kent and me if we'd mind standing behind the machine and mowing away the straw. He'd have done it himself only his heart was bad, and he had a touch of asthma and couldn't stand the dust and the dirt.

"We'll do anythin'," Kent said joyfully.

The engine started. First we thrashed oats, then barley. Dust, chaff, straw swirled in clouds over Kent and me in the dark mow,

and we scattered it quickly in all directions and stamped it down so as to make room for more. It was my first experience with a thrashing outfit, and I swore as violently as Jim ever did at the job that was assigned to us. Never had I known such odious work. Chaff and dust blew into my nose and mouth and crept under my skin and pricked me all over as with needles, and there was no chance for respite, for fresh piles kept swirling down and demanded instant removal. Kent cheered me with the reminder of the feast that awaited us and of the "extree dollar" we should earn. At last the job was finished, and I quickly darted out of the mow and rushed to the watering trough in Alonzo's near-by pasture, stripped to the waist and washed myself all over.

Though the sun was still high, Mrs Evans invited the whole thrashing crew to come in and eat. Alonzo didn't sit down at the table. Instead he helped his wife wait on the crowd of ravenous thrashers. Kent had not exaggerated the sumptuousness of the meal. Never had I seen so extravagant a display of "vittles" as greeted my eyes when I sat down beside Kent—bread and johnny-cake, beef and ham, potatoes, succotash and cottage cheese, butter and buttermilk, pies and cakes, tea and coffee! Kent was not alone in putting down one helping after another. We all did, I as much as anybody, for no other work I had ever done had stirred so prodigious an appetite in me; or perhaps it was only that the food was so tempting. When we arose from the table, Alonzo thanked Kent and me for coming and gave each of us a quarter.

"Jimminy Christmas!" exclaimed Kent in horror.

"What's the matter?" asked Alonzo quietly.

"This ain't no money, Alonzo," protested Kent, choking with rage.

"Two bits ain't no money?"

"No."

"Maybe it ain't to a rich man like you, but it is to a poor man like me," Alonzo answered and walked off.

"The damned tightwad," muttered Kent sullenly.

All the way home he fumed at Alonzo's miserliness.

After finishing our chores, we came to the house and sat down at the table. Neither Kent nor I was hungry, and not even Emilia's fat molasses cookies and chocolate layer cake tempted us. I had

put my quarter beside Jim's plate, and when he sat down and saw it he said:

"Whose two bits is this?"

I told him Alonzo had given it to me and I thought it was intended for him.

"Imagine the tightwad!" Kent exclaimed in scorn.

Jim looked at the quarter and smiled with a good-humored sneer.

"I have a notion to send it back to Alonzo," he said.

"There hain't nothin'," Kent burst out, "Alonzo 'd like better, the old buzzard. Imagine it, two bits for standin' back of the thrashin' machine and swallowin' tons of his d—— [Emilia's presence stopped Kent from finishing the word] dust. Jumminy Christmas!"

"There hain't no use yet gettin' so rambunctious about it," remarked Jim. "Ye hain't half as sorry gettin' the two bits as Alonzo is for payin' it to ye." Himself always short of cash, he deposited the coin in his pocket!

Evidently the talk displeased Emilia, for she said with feeling:

"The Evanses 's good folks, and there hain't no use ye sayin' they hain't."

Our respect for Emilia's person forbade further discussion of the subject, even though we didn't share her opinion.

Jim might dislike Alonzo Evans's politics and his miserliness, but he respected the man's virtues as a farmer—"a man who never let a spear of hay go to waste and never let a ragweed get started in his potato field." But Bill Young had not a single redeeming virtue in Jim's eyes. "A lazy pup," was the mildest epithet he hurled at his nearest neighbor. In fact, when I first arrived on the farm, Kent had cautioned me against making friends with Bill. "Jim won't like it," he warned me, for Bill was a bad influence with hired men. He got them excited about hunting, fishing, card playing, and they took time off to indulge in these pastimes and neglected their work. I never saw Jim or Emilia visit the Youngs or put a foot on their premises. Nor did either of them evince friendliness when Bill came to the house. At first I politely brushed aside Bill's efforts to make friends, though his ready speech and

his expansive sociability attracted me. When I started hunting woodchucks, I found his help indispensable and, in spite of Kent's warning, Jim never uttered a word of disapproval of our comradeship.

Of medium height, with a broad chest, a thick neck, muscular shoulders and snapping blue eyes, Bill always moved with an energy and an alertness that contradicted only too eloquently Jim's chief charge against him. No man as sprightly and vigorous as Bill could, I felt, be guilty of laziness. As I watched him handle steel traps, set them in woodchuck holes, build rock walls round them or pull them out by the chain, with a woodchuck securely held in the clamps, he seemed to me the acme of action and enterprise. Bill's persuasive talk of his heroic achievements with a team in the woods only heightened this impression.

"You hain't seen no loggin', I tell you, until you've watched me skid 'em out of the swamp. Boy oh boy, how I roll them out! Jim, the old windbag, couldn't do in a week as much as I can in an hour, and he's blowin' his head off I hain't got the guts to work." The energy and enthusiasm that Bill put into his speech were in themselves a testimony to his zest for work, so it seemed to me.

Yet I had only to glance at the sagging doors and walls of his barns, the neglect that peered out of every window and between the scantlings of his house, the deep mud after a rain in his barnyard, the stunted stalks of his oats, the sparse grass in his meadows, to appreciate Jim's indictment of the man. No doubt he was a paradox, a mystery which Jim never bothered to explain to himself. Obviously there were some things that Bill enjoyed doing and could do supremely well, and other things that paralyzed his very impulse to work. Was it his Indian blood—his father was half Indian—or his years of adventure in the north woods in the Adirondacks that had developed an attitude which Jim and farmers like him deemed reprehensible?

During haying, help was so scarce that Jim found himself obliged to hire Bill to help us draw in the hay.

"You do the loadin'," Bill said to Kent, "and Maurice and me 'll do the pitchin'." Turning to me, he said breezily, "I'll show you how to pitch hay. You just watch."

I did, breathless with admiration. I had never seen a man pick so many bunches in one forkful and lift them into the wagon with such an easy and rhythmic sweep of the arms. Sweat poured down his face, the muscles on his back and arms gleamed with power as he flitted rabbitlike from one row to another, jabbing his fork into three or four bunches and swinging them swiftly upward over his head and then dropping them with a fierce jam into the proper place so that Kent only needed to step on them to keep them bound to the load. I envied the ease and the speed with which he worked, and once when he exclaimed in triumph, "Hain't I the best worker you've even seen?" I answered gladly, "You sure are, Bill. I couldn't pitch hay like you in a hundred years." "There hain't nobody else could, neither," he flung back gloatingly. He pitched at least three times as fast as I did, and I thought that even Jim, had he seen him, would modify his opinion of the man's capacity for work. Indeed, whenever we came down to the barn, Jim marveled at the speed with which we had put up our loads, and as he hitched the team to the horse fork he kept repeating with enthusiasm that that was the way hay should be hauled so as to cheat the weather man of a chance to drench it with rain.

After dinner Kent and I drove out to the hayfield. We waited for Bill, and when he failed to come I went to his house to inquire what had happened to him. His wife said he had gone down to the river to get a mess of bullheads!

"Goddam his soul," Jim shouted in wrath, "he could've earned more in an afternoon than all the bullheads in the river's worth, the rotten, lazy, loafin' blackleg!"

In the evening, after we finished our chores, Bill came over and showed us the string of perch and bullheads he had caught. Jim asked why he failed to show up in the hayfield when he had promised to work all day, and he said lightheartedly that while eating dinner he had changed his mind and gone fishing instead.

Another time Bill and I went to the woods to cut firewood. I brought along Jim's big saw, but Bill waved it aside.

"I can chop down a tree with the axe quicker than we can saw it," he boasted.

Nor was it only a boast. With his double-edged axe he swung

away at a big ash with such speed and power that the thick slivers flew up and down in steady succession. Not one stroke did he waste; hardly a swing of the axe missed its mark. It was stirring to watch him, and when the tree crashed to the ground, he bounded squirrel-like on top of it and cried joyfully:

"Hain't I told you I'd cut it quicker than we could saw it?"

I proceeded to trim the tree, and he started cutting another. He cut them faster than I could trim them, and finally, amidst words of rapturous self-adulation, he helped me cut and stack the limbs. As we were on our way home for dinner, he kept twirling his sharp axe in his hands and said over and over:

"There hain't nobody round here can do more work with her [the axe] than I can. Jim, the old fool, hain't got no kick comin' when he sees all them trees we've cut down, has he? And we'll cut a lot more in the afternoon."

After dinner I went up the woods alone and worked all afternoon. Bill never showed up. Instead he lay on the grass in the shade, played with his dog and his children and whistled a tune.

"Why didn't you come up the woods?" I asked him when I came down for chores.

"I guess," he said, "I've got a right to rest if I've got a mind to, hain't I?"

Jim heard him and quickly snapped out:

"An' ye've got a right to go to the poorhouse and die like a pauper, ye blasted fool."

Bill was so amused that he laughed heartily.

One afternoon when our cows came home, one of them, Betsie, a scrub Holstein, was missing. Jim thought she had gone " 'way off in the woods to have her calf," and he sent me to find her. Though from a high hill or even from the highway the nine-mile swamp looked like a narrow strip of woods, once inside I always had the illusion that I was in a dense forest, with the pine and cedar rising so high as to shut out the sky. I wandered all over, shouting at the top of my voice, "Come bo-o-o-ss, come bo-o-o-o-ss," but found no trace of the lost cow. I wondered if she had hid the calf in the bush. Jim had once told me that cows sometimes like to do that.

"Animals 's got a lot of decency in them," he said. "When they

have their young ones and when they die, they like to go away and hide."

I searched widely in the bushes, shouted again and again, "Come bo-o-o-ss," but I failed to find the cow. I was on the verge of returning to the barn, when of a sudden I heard a loud sound. I paused and listened, thinking that it might be the bellowing of the cow or the bleating of the calf. Instead it was a human voice, seemingly not far away. I followed in the direction from which it came.

Dusk had already begun to settle over the trees, and the sudden discovery of a human voice in the midst of the thick and mighty pines and cedars startled me and gave me a feeling of hazard and adventure. Soon enough I came upon a strange sight. Kneeling before a sapling cedar, with one arm around it and with the fist of the other banging away as though the tree were someone to whom he was administering a beating, was Gerard, Bill's father. His hat was gone, his shirt was open in front, sweat rolled down his face, and the fist with which he was banging at the tree was bloody. He was saying:

"Bill, ye dirty lunkhead, ye hain't goin' to take my pension money from me no more, not one damned cent. I'll drink it up, I tell ye, and I'll lick the stuffin' out of ye, and don't ye think I can't. There now," and he landed a succession of wallops on the imperturbable sapling.

I spoke to the old man, but he paid no attention to me. Advancing close, I tried to lift him to his feet, and he struck me a violent blow on the head. Again I spoke to him, but he continued to pound away at the tree and threaten it and swear at it as though it were Bill in the flesh. I went home with no cow but with news for Bill of his father, his whereabouts, his condition, his temper. Bill asked me to show him where the old man was. Choked with exasperation, because his father's pension was his chief source of support, Bill did not speak a word all the way to the swamp.

We found Gerard in the same position in which I had left him, except that the fist with which he had been pounding at the tree was so badly lacerated and so soaked in blood that he was resting it now and was using the other to keep up the pounding. Without a word of comment Bill swung his arms around him, lifted him on

his shoulders and started for home. The old man kicked and cried and swore amidst tears that unless liberated he "would lick the stuffin' " out of everybody in Mount Brookville. I offered to hold his wildly kicking legs, but Bill shouted for me not to get near or I'd get hurt.

The next morning, as we were milking our cows, Bill came down to see Jim. Sullen and crushed, he said, "By gosh, Jim, the old fool's drunk up his pension money, every damn cent of it, and now we can't buy no flour and no groceries."

Broken in spirit, Bill made a sorry sight. But Jim was unmoved.

"If ye'd had a mind to work," he said cuttingly, "ye wouldn't need to depend on yer father like ye couldn't live without him."

"I'll work," Bill burst out with sudden enthusiasm. "I'll do anythin' you want me to, Jim, if you'll only buy me a sack of flour when your milk team goes to town, an' you know there hain't nobody can work as fast as I can once I get started."

"The trouble is," said Jim, "ye don't like to get started."

"I will now, Jim, I promise, an' I hain't often gone back on my word, you know I hain't. All I want is a sack of flour so's we can have bread in the house."

Jim hesitated, not because he could not offer Bill work, but because buying a sack of flour was no easy matter for him at the moment. Finally he agreed to do it—he would scrape the money together somehow if Bill would promise on his word of honor to help Kent and me cut wood for the hop kiln.

"You hain't need to worry about that, Jim," Bill assured him. "I'll join the boys 's soon as I've had my breakfast, and we'll cut all the hopwood you need in one day. See if we don't. Thanks a lot, Jim. I knowed you wouldn't let me down when I'm so hard up."

Buoyed by fresh hope, Bill dashed out of the cow stable and started for home.

After breakfast Kent and I went up the woods, but Bill never joined us. When we came down for dinner Jim said:

"I guess Bill hain't goin' to do a stroke of work now for a long time. He'd gone to the swamp again and searched round and found twenty dollars of the old man's pension money. Next time the pup's askin' me for a sack of flour I'll tell him to go home and starve to death."

Clearly Jim was incensed, and not only because Bill failed him again. The man's effusive ego and his love of adventure were as alien and repugnant to Jim as stealing fruit from a neighbor's orchard. Bill was a playboy and followed the bent of his violent impulses, with no regard for the code, the discipline, the good opinion of his neighbors. He didn't work unless he absolutely had to, or only when he could assert his superiority over others, and for no longer time than necessary to evoke recognition and praise. The rest of the time he fished, hunted, played cards with his wife and father, lay around in the shade on the grass whistling or frolicking with his dog and his children. In spite of Jim I could not help feeling that there was something heroic in Bill's insistence on being himself. He enjoyed pleasures which neither Jim nor Art nor Alonzo nor any of the other neighbors had ever seriously cared to cultivate. He was, I thought, a much happier man inwardly than any of them. Yet later an incident happened which upset my conclusion.

The previous spring Bill had borrowed a load of hay from Heinrich Friedhof, our German neighbor. One day Heinrich drove up with his hayrack to Bill's barn to collect the debt. Heinrich's own hired man having gone to town, he came to ask Jim if Kent or I could help him. Jim sent me along. Heinrich and I got into the haymow and pitched to Bill, who was on the hayrack, loading. The more we pitched, the thinner grew the layer of hay over Bill's cow stable. Of a sudden Bill stuck his pitchfork deep into the hay on the load and, turning to Heinrich, shouted in wrath:

"You might 's well take a shotgun and kill them cattle o' mine as take away all my hay."

Heinrich was undismayed.

"I hain't takin' nottin' dot don't belong to me," he remonstrated.

"It don't make no difference," thundered Bill. "My cattle's goin' to starve to death if you take away any more o' that fodder."

Heinrich shrugged his shoulders and, wagging his head, said to me:

"Can you beat dot? I done de man a favor, and now he gets sore 'cause he's got to pay it back." Turning to Bill, he said, "I need de hay for my cattle."

Without further word, Bill slid down the load and, stepping over

to a stanchion, grasped the top railing with his hands and started crying. I had never heard anyone in Mount Brookville cry, and I never had imagined that the men were capable of tears. Hadn't Jim once said, "I hain't never cried and I hain't agoin' to, neither, by Jesus"? And now Bill Young was gulping his sobs quite openly in the presence of Heinrich and myself. Then I recalled with a pang the two strangers who once came to our house in the old village to collect a debt which Father had owed them. Mother didn't disavow the debt, but when they drove into the barn to take the hay in payment, she had prostrated herself at the door and defied them to haul it out over her body. She knew that if the hay were taken she couldn't keep her cow and without milk she couldn't feed herself and her brood of children during the long winter months. My heart went out to Bill and, dropping my pitchfork to the floor, I jumped down and said to Heinrich:

"I'll be damned if I'm going to help you any more."

Picking up my pitchfork, I walked out of the barn.

No, Bill wasn't as happy as I had imagined. I wished he were a little less like Bill Young and a little more like Jim Hoyt!

## CHAPTER XVII

## *Elder Jepson*

IN A LITTLE OVER A YEAR Elder Jepson had performed a miracle. The Baptist church, which for a long time had been inconspicuously struggling to maintain itself, suddenly became a flourishing house of worship and a popular gathering place with "lots of social doin's." Its membership, though increasing, was still small, but there was new pride in the little congregation and fresh hope for the future of the church.

There were men in Mount Brookville who vowed that the elder's sermons neither moved nor instructed them. Yet they often went to hear him preach. The stories and anecdotes with which he illumined his exhortations gave them pleasure. There were others —Jim, for example—who swore that they couldn't be dragged to a

service with a "four-horse team." When I asked Jim why he was so averse to hearing the elder, he replied that he was a good enough man without any preacher trying to make him better, which was no aspersion on the Baptist or any other minister. Rather it was a revelation of Jim's sturdy self-sufficiency. Tolerant of all faiths, he had made no place in his life for church and missed neither its spiritual nor its social ministrations. Still other citizens made sport of the elder's theology, especially of its abundance of hell fire. But no one ever made merry over his person, except when by accident or design he revealed foibles as laughable as their own. Not even the men who gathered nightly at any of the three saloons spoke harshly of him. They knew his hatred for the saloon, but they admired his good-fellowship, for if he passed by when they were on the porch, he would wave his hand and shout, "Good evening, gentlemen."

Hardly a church activity but the elder had invested with a spirit of jollity and comradeship. A supper or social was no longer a routine affair, which only Baptists were called upon to attend. It had become an event for the whole community to anticipate and to enjoy. The "literary program" alone, which the elder took great pains to prepare, made it a memorable experience. The Professor (principal of the school) never put on as lively or as exciting an entertainment, not even on Christmas Eve or during commencement.

In other villages and towns Baptists and other ministers might lament the collapse of religion among the young people as evinced by their conspicuous absence from services, but not Elder Jepson. Not in the memory of the oldest member of the congregation had so many young people been coming to services and Sunday school or shown such devotion to the elder. Methodist young people readily joined his Sunday-school class of True Blues. Catholic boys didn't mind coming to its biweekly socials. In rain and blizzard boys and girls from other villages drove for miles to attend these lively gatherings. Briefly the stories that I had heard of the elder testified to an extraordinary talent for good-fellowship. Since his advent, not only God but man had been reaping a bountiful harvest of cheer and good will in Mount Brookville.

With my boundless interest in the America in which I was liv-

ing, it was only natural that I should gravitate toward Elder Jepson and his Baptist church.

One evening I went to Mount Brookville to buy stamps in the post office. The delivery window was shut, and the postmaster, coughing continuously, was sorting the letters that had arrived by the evening train. More and more people, chiefly men, were coming in. A small room lighted by a hanging lamp with a stove and a vaselike spittoon in the center, the post office made me think of the living room in our house in the old village where peasants gathered evenings to talk themselves out. Peasants of course quickly warmed to their subjects and raised their voices higher and higher and waved their arms until our living room boomed with loud talk. Here quiet reigned. People sat on the window sills, leaned against the walls, chewed tobacco, smoked, chatted, laughed and appeared at peace with themselves and the world.

Presently Elder Jepson came. Though I had never seen him before, I recognized him instantly by his dark suit, his winged celluloid collar, his flowing black tie, above all by his cheerful manner. Short, stocky, with broad shoulders, a large head, he seemed to walk on springs, so light and buoyant were his steps. Smooth-shaven, with heavy reddish brows over his small, deep-set blue eyes, with a soft, full round face that had barely been scorched by sun and wind, he radiated good-fellowship with every gesture of the hand, every sway of the body, and most of all with his singularly vibrant voice. He almost chanted his "good evening, folks," as he bowed to the assemblage of farmers. On observing me, a stranger, he came over, shook hands and said affably:

"You're the boy from New York who's working for Jim Hoyt?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very happy to know you, sir."

"I am glad of the chance to meet you."

"I hear you are from Rooshia?"

"Yes, sir."

"You're a long way from home, aren't you?"

"Most of our family are in this country now."

"Father and mother, too?"

"Father is dead; Mother is here. She brought us over."

"Did she?"

"Yes, sir."

"D'you like working on a farm?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is Jim Hoyt good to you?"

"Yes, sir." I was too overcome with elation to make more than direct answers to his questions.

"I'm glad to hear that. That's the way it should be. Farmers should be good to their hired men."

"They'd better be," someone interjected, "if they wants to keep them."

The elder glanced at the speaker, chuckled understandingly and, turning back, resumed his questioning:

"D'you belong to a Christian church?"

"No, sir. I am Jewish."

"Well," he snapped out cheerily, "we Christians got our religion from your people. Yes, sir," he repeated with emphasis, as if to reassure me of the sincerity of his words, "we did, and we're mighty proud of it, too."

More and more people were coming for their mail and on entering paused to listen to the conversation.

"Have you ever attended a Christian service?"

"Not in this country."

"You aren't objecting to going to a Christian church?"

"Not in the least."

"Well, if you feel like coming over some Sunday to our services we'll be mighty glad to welcome you."

"I've been thinking of coming," I said.

"We're always happy to welcome strangers, no matter what their religion is."

"Thanks."

"Sometimes when strangers are far away from their folks they get lonesome and want to meet people and make friends, and there's no better place in this village than the Baptist church."

"That's right, Elder," someone broke in, "there's lots of social doin's in the Baptist church since you've been pastor."

"That's the way it should be," said the elder with pride. "A church should bring people together not only for worship but for clean good times. Yes, sir, that's what I've always believed."

The friendliness of the elder pleased me, and his questioning almost took my breath away. At last I had met a person in Mount Brookville who, on just becoming acquainted with me, did not hesitate to ply me with personal questions. Even if it was the special prerogative of a preacher to take a paternal interest in strangers, particularly young people, it was refreshing to be the object of that interest. There was not a thought or sentiment I harbored that I was not ready to share with the friendly elder, so famished was I for an exchange of ideas.

Not that I felt lonely. My days were crowded with work, with discoveries about land, crops, livestock, and with the multitude of fresh sensations that these aroused. But I craved more—an intimacy with people to which I had been accustomed in the old village and which I had not known in Mount Brookville. As well as I knew Jim, he never had sought to pry or even look into my inner life, nor I into his, any more than he chose to reveal by his own words or than others with their gossip helped me to obtain. Yet my curiosity about the inner life of people was as immense as the desire to share mine with them. Like a hidden spring in Bill Young's hilly pasture, with brush, reeds and sod encumbering the outlet, I was ready to gush into the open the moment the encumbrance was cleared away. I was therefore hoping that the elder would continue his interrogations long enough to inspire me with courage to question him too, and the thought of the enlightenment I should gain gave me keen pleasure. The presence of other people, many of them utter strangers, and the attention they were giving to the conversation neither irked nor embarrassed me.

But my hopes failed of realization. As soon as the postmaster opened the window, the elder went over, got his mail, glanced at it and made ready to leave. "Good evening, gentlemen," he said and walked out. I followed with dejected eyes, and when I was getting my stamps I said to the postmaster:

"I wish Elder Jepson didn't have to leave. I like talking to him."

"A mighty nice fellow," answered the postmaster, "and a very powerful preacher."

Thereupon John Roadsdell, whom I had often seen at the milk station, and who had just entered, proffered an enlightening comment on the elder.

"He may be a powerful preacher. I hain't never heard him, and I can't say. But he ain't much on work."

There was amusement more than derision in John's words, and the postmaster eyed him with a touch of displeasure. John was a small man, muscular, with a broad back, protruding eyes and a face glowing with sunburn. There was something of the rugged bluntness of the surrounding hills in his voice and his manner.

"Preachers ain't supposed to be much on work," someone else added, and a titter spread in the room.

"He came round the other day," John Roadsdell resumed expansively, "and said he'd heard I was lookin' for a man to paint my barn, and as he wanted to earn a few extree dollars, he wondered if I'd let him do the job. 'Sure,' I said, 'ye kin have the work if ye want to do it.' He seemed pleased that I'd offer it to him and said he was goin' home to change his clothes and would come right down and start workin'! I got the paint and brush ready, and when he came down I told him to go ahead. He hain't worked no more than an hour when he said he guessed he wasn't built for work."

"Did he quit?"

"He sure did."

Again there was laughter, in which the postmaster didn't join.

Of a sudden the elder reappeared, and at once the talk and laughter subsided. He turned to me and said:

"I forgot to tell you, I'm going to preach a special sermon for young people a week from Sunday. I wish you'd come over."

"Thank you," I said, flattered by the attention he was according me. I was hoping he would invite me to come with him to his home so we could sit together and talk for hours about everything in the world. Instead, on noticing John Roadsdell he greeted him heartily and asked:

"Got your barn painted yet, John?"

"Not yet, Elder, can't find the time to do it myself and can't find nobody who's got time to do it for me."

"Sorry I couldn't do it. I can't stand the heat." I gaped at him

with surprise and commiseration. I never had expected a Christian minister to speak of himself with such humility and regret.

When he left there was no laughter, and as if to reinforce the man's justification of himself, the postmaster said:

"Hot weather affects his heart, and he's got to be careful."

On my way home, walking crosslots over the hills, I was preoccupied with thoughts of my new acquaintance. Here was a Christian clergyman of whose kind I had never heard. My conceptions of men in his profession were still associated with the Orthodox priests I had known in Russia, particularly with the Little Father of the parish of my old village. Friendly as was the Little Father, and liked by his parishioners, they yet stood in awe of him and of the social and mystical gulf that divided them from him. I could not picture him acknowledging publicly a wrong or a failing of which he might have been guilty. He could not possibly lower himself to the level of his parishioners in the manner of Elder Jepson. His education, his economic well-being, his official position, his robes and vestments during services, lifted him high above the mud and the thatch of his parish and the very voices of the people to whom he was ministering. But Elder Jepson, from the few words I had heard him speak and from the comments of others, appeared as indissolubly earthy as John Roadsdell or any of the other farmers in the post office. In spite of his winged celluloid collar, his flowing black tie, his face smooth shaven even on weekdays, he hadn't disdained to try his hand at painting a barn for hire, like an ordinary laborer, nor had he concealed disappointment at his failure to make good at the task. The fact of his failure moved me as much as his public recognition of it. Perhaps my father's endless failures had made me oversensitive to the defeats, however inconsequential, of older people, and at the moment I wished that the elder might again try to paint John Roadsdell's barn and wipe out his defeat. But the simplicity and humility of the man were disarming, and I immediately resolved to cultivate his friendship.

About a week later, as I was lifting empty milk cans out of the wagon and setting them out on the stand by the road, I heard a

milk team clanking down the hill toward me. It was Alexis, the young man from Quaker Hill, who some time earlier had helped me to get my horse and wagon out of the creek. He was on his way home with a load of empty cans. Beside him on the front seat was a girl, and though I had never seen her before, she, like Alexis, spoke to me as they came up. Alexis drew on his lines and stopped his horses. I was sure there was something he wished to say, and I turned to listen. It was not he but the girl who addressed me:

"Elder Jepson," she said, "wanted me to remind you he's going to preach a special sermon for young people next Sunday morning, and he wanted you to be sure and come."

For an instant I was speechless with surprise and pleasure. I had meant to go to the service to which the elder had already invited me. The fresh reminder of the invitation, voiced by this strikingly attractive girl, stirred me. I remembered Kent's words, that the prettiest girls in Mount Brookville were going to the Baptist church. Jim too had once said that if he was a young "whipper-snapper" like me he wouldn't miss a Sunday in the Baptist church, because all the pretty girls were there, and "Baptist girls like their sparkin' as much as any girls." Now Kent's and Jim's words had assumed a living and captivating reality. I looked at the girl and admired her dark hair, her shining white teeth, her smiling lips and her easy and friendly demeanor. She fitted superbly into the picture of hills and trees and blossoming clover in the near-by fields.

"I've been thinking of coming," I said.

"Elder Jepson 'll be disappointed if you don't," she said, smiling.

Disappointed? I wondered! I had not yet learned to allow for the exaggerations and pleasantries that were a part of the polite usage of the country. Too deeply ingrained in me was the Old World literal-mindedness.

"Good-by," said the girl, waving a friendly hand and smiling.

Alexis waved too, and they drove off. With one foot in the milk wagon and the other on the stand, I followed the receding team with longing eyes. Had I had the courage I should have shouted to Alexis to halt and would have gone over and told the girl that if she would promise to be at the services next Sunday I would not think of staying away. I had hardly spoken to any girls since my

arrival in Mount Brookville. I had in fact met but few American girls in all the time that I had been in this country, and the unexpected friendliness of this girl whose name I didn't know stirred in me a host of exciting and joyous sensations.

Though it was a cool and cloudy morning, with rain threatening, the shed by the side of the church was crowded with buggies, signifying that the elder's special announcement had brought out a large congregation. When I entered, services were already in progress. The choir was singing a hymn. The elder was in the pulpit, leaning back in a plush seat, with hands interlaced on his lap. In his frock coat, neatly pressed trousers and gleaming black shoes, he looked handsome and imposing. He was a clergyman now, a man of authority, invested with a special mission and conscious of a grave responsibility. With his eyes on the choir he was listening to the singing, and so was the congregation.

Never before had I been inside a Protestant church, and as I glanced around I was dismayed by the austerity of the place. Not a single ikon, not one piece of sculpture, nowhere a symbol or an image to awe the mind or stir the emotions. It was as unlike the picture of a Christian church that I had carried in my mind, copied of course from the parish church I had seen in the old home, as the elder in his civilian attire was unlike the Orthodox priest in his array of gorgeous vestments. Save for the organ, the stained-glass windows, the pulpit, the plush chair in which the elder was sitting, the huge leather-bound gilt-edged Bible in full view of the congregation, there was nothing to remind the visitor of the specifically Christian nature of this house of worship. There was not even a sign of a cross anywhere, not one wooden cross! So devoid was it of any ornamentation or denominational insignia that were the pulpit moved to the center of the room and a little platform built around it, it might easily pass for an Orthodox Jewish synagogue of the kind that I had seen in the town in Russia where I had gone to school. Incidentally this was the first but not the last time that I observed a similarity between this church and an Orthodox Jewish synagogue.

Most of the people in the pews were women, dressed in somber colors and wearing hats. The number of men was small, and in the

center, in specially reserved pews, were the young people. Longingly I searched these pews with my eyes, but the girl who had stopped to remind me of the elder's invitation was not there. I felt disappointed and hoped with all my heart that she would come before services were over. The power with which she drew me transcended all other immediate attractions. I had not suspected until the moment how intense this power had suddenly become. However, since attendance at a Protestant service was a fresh experience for me, I soon became absorbed in the scene before me. Every move of the elder, every response of the congregation, every hymn of the choir unfolded a fresh aspect not only of the religion but of the civilization of the community of which I had become a part.

Elder Jepson was blessed with a deep baritone voice, and he used it with immense energy. He gestured freely—now violently spreading his arms to his sides, now lifting them over his head, now clenching and unclenching his fists and now and then swinging them down with a bang on the pulpit or a slap on the enormous Bible. It was obvious that the man loved his calling, especially the preaching, and that he sought with all the power at his command to rouse the congregation to an emotional appreciation of his message. Using simple language and freely disregarding rules of grammar, he illustrated his thoughts and deductions with examples and experiences drawn from the everyday life of his parishioners. The congregation listened with rapt attention.

The burden of his sermon was a denunciation of the special sins that beset young people in their daily life. Man's foremost duty on earth, he proclaimed with passion, was to obey the Lord as unquestioningly as a soldier obeyed his officer or as a good hired man obeyed the farmer for whom he worked. (I thought it significant that he never used the word "boss"—thus emphasizing the familial status of a hired man in Mount Brookville.) Suppose a farmer told his hired man to throw stones over a fence and then back again into the field—what was the hired man to do? Of course he was to obey. The farmer might only be trying to find out if he could depend on his man to do as he was told. That was the way of the Lord, too. If the Lord asked a man to do something

which he didn't like, who was he to question the ways of the Lord? . . . Why did farmers put paris green on potato plants when the bugs showed up? To prevent the bugs from eating up the vines and killing the potato crop. Why did farmers hoe and cultivate their corn? To save it from being choked by weeds. Why was sin bad? Because it destroyed the vines that nourished man's soul and choked virtue out of him. What, then, was man to do? He was to fight sin as relentlessly as a farmer fights bugs on potato vines or weeds in his cornfields. Otherwise the seed of virtue, Christian virtue, which the Lord had planted in him, never would blossom and ripen into a bountiful harvest of good deeds. And what were the special sins that young people needed to fight against with all their might? Doubt in the Lord—in the Father, the Son, the Holy Ghost! What else? Card playing, smoking, drinking, dancing!

Then followed stories of young people who had fallen into sin and whom he, Elder Jepson himself, had sought to redeem and bring back to the Lord and to a cleansed and joyous life. Tears showed in the eyes of women as they listened to these graphic accounts of sin-blasted lives. Elder Jepson frankly admitted that sometimes the devil got the best of him and he failed to wrest a young victim from his nefarious clutches. But he was never going to fail again, not in Mount Brookville. Whether or not they were members of his church, or served God in any way, he loved all the young people in the town and on the farms, and they were welcome to his house, day or night, any hour of the night, whenever they might be in need of his help or of God's mercy!

I could understand now why a hardheaded realist like Jim or John Roadsdell, who had made a brilliant success of raising pure-bred Holstein cows, would not be particularly impressed with the logic of the elder's reasoning. To me the logic was nebulous and the exhortations dismaying. I couldn't help comparing the elder's precepts to those to which I had been accustomed. Mother had forbidden me and her other sons to smoke and to drink liquor. But she had never said a word about card playing. Nor had I ever heard anyone else ever investing it with the taint of sin. In the old village during the long winter evenings young people, especially if they had been in the army, often got together and spent hours

playing such games as "On the Wagon," and their only regret was that they had no one to teach them "Preference" or "Russian Bank," games which the parish priest and the landlord and the officials played whenever they got together.

As for dancing, we grew up with it, reveled in it, and had come to regard it as one of our foremost and most exhilarating diversions. So much was it a part of the ritual, the glory, the justification of living, that if a ban were put on it there would have been no sense in having Sundays, Christmas, New Year's, Trinity or any other holidays, any more than there would have been sense in a girl buying ribbons for her hair, beads for her neck, or embroidering her shirtwaist with the designs of daisies and cornflowers if she were banned from displaying them in her own home or in public. Dancing gave color and rhythm, thunder and melody, to an otherwise monotonous and dismal life.

The old civilization out of which I had come emphasized solely the pleasure of dancing; the new civilization in which I was living, or rather the spokesman of its leading church, emphasized solely the ruin that the pleasure might invite. I didn't see how I could reconcile the clash in my mind or in my life. Still it was enlightening to listen to the ideas which the elder so vehemently propounded.

When services were over, the elder invited me to attend the session of his widely famed class of True Blues, and as I was mounting the rostrum where the class gathered, the girl for whose presence I had yearned appeared as if shot out of the earth She hadn't been to services, but she came to the class of True Blues. She greeted me with her friendly smile and with a warm handshake, and like the elder she thanked me for coming to church. (Would there be an end to these effusive expressions of gratitude for favors bestowed on me?)

"Your name is Maurice," she said. She even knew my name!

I asked who had told her, and she said Alexis, and he had also told her, she went on, that I was a foreigner from Russia and had lived in New York and wanted someday to go to college! I knew now that Jim had been spreading this information, for I had spoken of myself in detail only to him. Nor was I displeased with this

discovery. "My name," the girl continued, "is Paulette Burwill," and to my immense joy she sat down beside me.

When the lesson was over, Paulette asked me to come to the next social of the True Blues. It would be held at the Martins', across the swamp, and the young people living in or near the village would assemble on the church steps and drive there together in hayracks. I could join the crowd or I could come by myself. The elder heard her and, grasping my hand, he insisted that I promise to come. "We're always having wonderful times at these socials, aren't we, Paulette?" he said warmly.

"We sure are," answered Paulette, and as our eyes met I was conscious again of a pleasant disturbance inside. I promised.

On the appointed evening I walked to the Martins', and the others came in horse and buggies and in two huge hayracks. The elder was with them, as cheery and loquacious as ever. He told stories. He recited poems. He called on this or that boy or girl to say a piece or to tell an anecdote. He asked the postmaster's daughter, who was in the choir and had a trembling soprano voice, to sing. He expressed regret that one of the boys who played the cornet didn't bring his instrument and favor the class with a solo. He called on me to say a few words, and with a fluttering heart I mumbled out incoherently my appreciation of the invitation to the gathering. He beamed and bristled with good will and good humor. He was no longer the solemn, thundering, weeping preacher, threatening the visitation of God's fury on evildoers or offering the Lord's mercy to repentant sinners, but an humble, genial, talkative gentleman who knew young people, liked being with them and enjoyed their lighthearted chatter and laughter as much as they. No doubt that was one reason for the man's enormous popularity.

Presently he retired to the living room for a talk with the older folk of the house. Hardly had he stepped out when the class pushed aside chairs and tables and, to my dismay and bewilderment, started playing kissing games. Nor were they stealthy or reticent in their enjoyment of the pastime. They seemed as unburdened with a sense of impropriety or wickedness as when they were reciting pieces during the "literary" part of the evening. They

laughed and chattered and clapped hands and kissed with obvious and often prolonged exhilaration. At first they played a game known as "Spin the Platter." A boy and a girl moved to the center of the room, and one of them spun a saucer on the floor. As the spinning was coming to an end, each was supposed to reach out for the saucer. The one who missed had to be kissed. The one who succeeded did the kissing. Win or lose, reward or penalty, there was no escaping the kiss. Nor did any boy or girl seek to escape it. Tim Milburn, who couldn't afford a new suit of clothes and was always diffident in the presence of girls, and I were the only ones who stayed out of the game. I was too overcome with bewilderment, for never had I seen anything like it in the old village. Boys and girls kissed at dances, at spinning socials, at *nochleg,* with no show of promiscuity and no search of a collectivized justification for the indulgence. Never should I have imagined that these valiant youths of Elder Jepson's Baptist church would lapse into such fervent awareness of "the pleasures of the flesh." Yet here they were proclaiming this awareness with untrammeled, almost boastful, delight.

Soon they tired of "Spin the Platter" and proceeded to play "Post Office." Adjoining the parlor in which they were holding the social was a bedroom which became the "post office." Someone carried in a lamp and set it there on the table. Someone else hastened to blow out the light. Nobody bothered to light the lamp again. Now the kissing was no longer in public. The boy or girl who was postmaster "delivers letters," plain or special delivery, in the privacy of the post office, to those whom he or she wanted most to kiss. There was no objection to the postmaster addressing several letters to the same party, and the girls were as eager to hold the job of postmaster as were the boys, even Paulette!

I quaked with anxiety. What would Elder Jepson say? Surely he could hear the laughter and the excitement. Any minute the door might fly open and, like a guardian of the law suddenly bursting on a crowd of wrongdoers, he might rush in and then —then what? I shivered at the prospect of a scene and watched the door to the parlor with ever-mounting anxiety. Presently it opened and the elder peeped in. My breath stopped, but the

man showed no sign of perturbation. To my amazement he walked in, stood by the door, watched the game and smiled beneficently and as if with approval. The young people showed neither embarrassment nor repentance. They seemed hardly aware of his presence. They called out letters and telegrams with unabated enthusiasm and went in and out of the "post office" with undisguised exhilaration. Was it possible that the elder would abstain from making a scene and from delivering an impromptu sermon on the unholy impulses of youth? Should he launch into a castigation, even Paulette might smile no longer—she might even weep with repentance. But he said not a word nor betrayed any concern. These pupils of his much-vaunted Sunday-school class might have been reading the Bible for all the anxiety he showed. Dumfounded with surprise, I braved myself to approach him and ask if I might put to him a question.

"Go ahead, my boy, ask any question you like. I'll be happy to answer it, if I can," he answered joyously.

"In your sermon last Sunday you said dancing was very bad for young people."

Instantly the elder grew grave. "Yes, my boy, very bad, leads to ruin, an infamous sin."

"But you don't object to kissing games?"

The elder burst into peals of laughter. Rolling back his large and majestic head, he said, amidst gulps of mirth:

"There's nothing wrong in kissing games. I used to play them myself when I was a boy!" and he again rolled back his head and laughed.

Now I knew that the elder and I would be excellent friends.

The evening on which I received a volume of Tolstoy's stories I ran into the elder in the post office. As I removed the wrapper from the book he glanced at the cover and informed me that he had all his life wanted to read Tolstoy's works but had never had the chance. He had heard of the great Russian writer and Christian, who had defied, single-handed, the "Roosian" church and the "Roosian" czar. At a Baptist conference a missionary had once spoken of Tolstoy as of one of the greatest living Christians. Would I mind letting him take the book home for a few days so

that he could read it? He would appreciate the privilege of learning something firsthand of this man of God. Gladly I let him take the volume. The first story in it was "The Kreutzer Sonata."

The following Sunday I was in church, and before starting his Sunday-school class the elder drew me aside, returned the Tolstoy volume, and with an expression of concern admonished me not to allow anyone in the class or any other person to read it. Innocently enough I asked why he was so disturbed by the story when in Russia young and old had read and acclaimed it with enthusiasm.

"I'm sorry, my boy," he explained earnestly, "it isn't a clean book, no, sir! Tolstoy must have written it before he got converted."

Again I was puzzled by the man, but I said nothing. The ways of Mount Brookville were much more mysterious than I had imagined, and there was much that I should need to learn before I could explain to myself the perplexing processes of thought of a man like the elder.

I settled back in my seat with the Tolstoy volume under my arm, resolved to obey the elder's admonition and not to show it to any of my classmates or to anyone else in the community. Yet in my heart I wished that the elder hadn't been shocked by the story. Lost in meditation, I didn't hear the approach of Mrs Lamb, the mother of a boy who was a member of the True Blues, and a teacher of one of the Sunday-school classes. She was a short woman with large brown eyes, a full-lipped mouth and a cheerful spirit.

"I saw the elder give you back the Tolstoy book," she said.

"Yes, he did," I said, clasping the volume tight under my arm and pushing it a little farther back so as to keep it out of view.

"I was at the parsonage the other evening," she said, "to a meeting of the Ladies' Aid, and I saw it on the table and started reading it. I got so interested I asked the elder to let me take it home, but he said it was yours, and when I just saw him give it back to you I thought I'd come over and ask if you could lend it to me for a few days."

I made no move to give her the book, and I didn't know what to say to her.

"I'll bring it back next Sunday or I'll give it to my son so he can return it to you in school."

Still I made no move to comply with her request.

"I'm sorry," I finally blurted out, "I don't think I ought to lend you the book."

"Why not?"

"I promised the elder I wouldn't let anybody read it."

To my amazement she gave a laugh.

"Didn't he like it?"

"No."

"What did he say?"

"He said it was an indecent book."

She gave another and more hearty laugh and said:

"Pshaw, don't pay any attention to what he says about novels. He's never read any in his life. The only book he knows is the Bible." I gave her the Tolstoy volume, and she went back to her Sunday-school class and started teaching the weekly lesson.

The word "Protestant" had assumed for me a fresh and pregnant meaning.

Elder Jepson was a poor man. He had his parsonage, a large two-story frame house with a small acreage of land which he rented on shares and from which he derived a small return, and he received a salary of three hundred dollars a year. Because of the comparative sparseness of the population, the incidental income from weddings and funerals constituted a negligible contribution to his subsistence. Yet no household in Mount Brookville was subjected to such heavy incidental expenses as the elder's. The various church committees often held their meetings in the parsonage, usually in the evening, after men and women were through with their work, and the elder's wife was always ready with cake, coffee, tea or hot chocolate and if the meeting happened to be protracted, with more substantial refreshments. Evangelists, missionaries and other church functionaries usually lived at the parsonage during their official visits. It was commonly known that the elder lived from hand to mouth and barely made ends meet. The best-dressed person in the community, he was one of the least affluent. Therefore when his young son started selling magazines and peddling oysters on Fridays, neighbors and others gladly patronized him. To help him further, the Ladies' Aid Society held

an annual oyster supper, the proceeds of which were turned over to him as a gift. Because of his love of sociability he had transformed the supper into the most triumphant event of the year, not only for members of the church but for the whole community. Folk who never stepped inside the church looked forward to it with no little pleasure. The "literary program" alone always roused widespread anticipation. No medicine show, no lyceum lecture in any of the neighboring towns, not even the visit of a bushy-haired man with motion pictures of the Passion Play, drew such a large attendance as the oyster supper in honor of Elder Jepson.

As the time for the event was drawing close, the elder gathered a committee of the True Blues to discuss with them plans for the literary program. There was much talk of a debate, a play, songs, recitations, and finally, as if with a burst of sudden inspiration, the elder said:

"I've been thinking that we ought to try something this village has never had—a mock trial."

We pricked up our ears for further explanation and, aware of our immediate response, the elder added with enthusiasm:

"A mock trial of a breach-of-promise case."

There was an outburst of merry guffaws, in which I did not join, for the simple reason that the words "breach of promise" were new to me and I did not understand their full implication. After the elder had explained at some length what he had in mind, I too joined with enthusiasm in the approval of the proposal. Immediately we proceeded to choose the cast of characters, the accused, the defendant, the witnesses, the judge, the clerk of the court, and when it came to the attorneys, the elder turned to me and said:

"I guess you and I'll be the lawyers."

"But," I protested, "I've never been in an American court and don't know what lawyers are supposed to do."

"Neither do I, my boy, but I'll teach you."

Then we worked out the details of the charge, the evidence, and waited expectantly for the big day.

The church was packed to overflowing. Not in a long time had it held so enormous a crowd. Even Jim came to see how his hired

man would act as a lawyer. The aisles and hallways were jammed with spectators. I shivered with anxiety, but the elder was jubilant and, pressing my hand, he murmured cheerfully, "You'll do fine—only remember everything I told you—and don't get scared. If you do, I'll sure trim you."

Ascending the rostrum, he delivered a short address of welcome, and then the trial began. The elder was not only the lawyer for the accused, he was everything. If I was lost for a question to put to a witness, he would lean over and whisper it. If a witness got confused and forgot what he was supposed to say, he somehow managed to bring the proper answer to his mind. If the judge was at a loss how to rule on an objection, whether from me or himself, he shook or nodded his head, and not once did I see him nod if the objection was his. The church rocked with noise and laughter, and the more loud the mirth of the audience, the more confused were the participants in the trial. Now and then I stole a glance at Jim, and he winked at me as if in approval. For once he wasn't even chewing tobacco. Then came the climax of the evening. I was examining the accused. His sister happened to be the defendant.

"Are you sure," I said, "you never proposed to her?"

"I am quite sure."

"But she says you did propose to her."

"I don't care what she says."

"How many times did you propose to her?"

"Not once."

"Impossible."

Whether he forgot himself or deliberately sought to create a commotion, he blurted out with feeling:

"I couldn't've proposed to her, because she's my sister."

The congregation exploded with laughter which wouldn't subside. I had never seen an audience in such hysterics, and it seemed useless to go on with the trial. Yet somehow we managed to bring it to an end. When the jury returned from its deliberations, it announced that it couldn't agree on a verdict, and without even waiting to dismiss the jury the judge jumped off the rostrum.

When we adjourned to the hall across the street for our oyster

stew and biscuits and ice cream and cake and coffee, people were still laughing. Not in a long time had they had so much fun, and even Jim felt constrained to remark that the elder was "as smart as hell to think up such an amusin' program."

Before Christmas the True Blues took up a collection of five dollars to buy the elder a present. One girl proposed that we buy him a pair of fur-lined leather gloves. Another girl seconded the motion and added that the elder needed new gloves, as his old ones were badly worn. The president of the class asked for discussion, and I at once leaped to my feet. I denounced the idea of such a commonplace material gift for the elder as unworthy of the intellectual dignity of the class and of the intellectual calling of the man. In a year or two, I argued with no little fervor, he would wear out the gloves, and then he wouldn't even remember that we had ever given him a Christmas present. Therefore, I continued the argument, the most appropriate gift would be a book that "had stood the test of the ages" (I had heard the elder use the sentence and was now proud to hurl it at the class), and to which he could turn for remembrance and inspiration the rest of his life, wherever he might be living. When the vote was taken, my proposal was carried by a majority.

Now the question arose as to the particular book we should send for. The class turned to me for suggestions, and without a moment's hesitation I blurted out, "Milton's *Paradise Lost.*"

Some of the members of the class hadn't heard of the book. I myself never had read it. I had heard of Milton as a great Puritan, and the title of *Paradise Lost* suggested a religious theme, and of course only a book with such a theme would be appropriate as a gift for Elder Jepson. My suggestion of a title was carried without any discussion. We sent to the near-by city for a handsomely bound copy of *Paradise Lost.* When it arrived we wrapped it in glistening green paper, tied it with a shiny gold ribbon and placed it under the church Christmas tree. The elder took off the wrapper, admired the elegant binding of the book, the gilt edges of the pages, the velvety texture of the paper, the handsome print, and thanked us profusely for thinking of him. Yet I wondered if he

was really pleased. Had he ever read Milton? Suppose he didn't like the poet or had found *Paradise Lost* a little too strenuous for his literary appreciation? Later in the evening, when I saw him put on his shiny old gloves, I was conscience-smitten. Why had I ever challenged the original proposal? How much more precious a new pair of fur-lined gloves would have been to the man than a whole set of Milton! He often had to make long drives in a sleigh in blizzards to visit sick people! I cursed myself for having assumed the pose of an intellectual amidst a people who were so much more earthy than I could ever hope to be.

Ever since then I seldom pass a haberdashery shop and see fur-lined gloves in the window without thinking of Elder Jepson and *Paradise Lost.*

Glen Marston was seventeen years old. Tall, lean, handsome, jovial, with flashing dark eyes, a rollicking sense of humor, he was always a center of attraction at the socials of young people. He seldom attended Sunday-school classes, but he rarely missed the biweekly gatherings of the True Blues, and there was one girl on Quaker Hill whom he had singled out for special attention. I often saw him on Sunday afternoon as, hooded in a fur coat with a fur wrap over his knees, he drove by in his cutter with jingling bells on his way to the Hill. Once he stopped and invited me to come along. Nathalie, his girl, had a cousin visiting her and wanted him to bring another boy so they could have a little party in her house. Chores prevented me from going, and as I saw him drive away I envied him the diversion and excitement in store for him on the high and wind-blown Hill. It was rumored that Glen, who had made many a girl's heart flutter first with expectancy, then with disappointment, had never been so serious as he was with Nathalie. Even Jim once ventured the opinion that Glen would find himself married to the Quaker girl "before he knowed it," implying, I suppose, that Nathalie would persuade him to marry her before he experienced another shift in his affections. Never angry and never moody, always gay and chivalrous, Glen Marston was one of the best-liked young men in the community.

One morning when I arrived at the milk station I learned that Glen had suddenly died from double pneumonia. The news shocked

the whole countryside. It seemed incredible that Glen, who was so enamored of life and so aglow with it, was no longer among the living. Wherever people gathered, they talked of the tragic news, not without enumerating and lauding the young man's manifold virtues. All the way home from the milk station I thought of Glen and felt broken over his passing.

The True Blues traveled in a body in two bobsleds to the funeral. I was among them, and so was the elder. A blizzard raged all morning, and on the way to the Marston farm we were lashed and blinded by endless swirls of snow. The higher we climbed the hilly road, the more fierce was the blizzard, and when we reached the Marston homestead the wind howled so piercingly that I could not help remembering the stories of evil spirits with which death on a stormy day was so often associated in the old village. I was sure I was the only one in the crowd of young people who was shaken, though not for long, by superstitious beliefs.

Since it was the first time that I had attended an American funeral, I marveled at the restraint and the orderliness of mourners and visitors. No hysterical wailing, no outcries of self-pity, no screams of despair. People were dressed in Sunday clothes and spoke freely, though in subdued voices. The family had prepared lunch, and at mealtime people sat down and partook of refreshments. They enjoyed the food; even the elder did. It all seemed so strange and unnatural and baffling, not at all like the behavior of men and even more of women in the old village who at a funeral indulged in an orgy of lamentation and self-castigation.

The elder delivered the funeral sermon—a brief and moving recital of the virtues and achievements of the young man and of the blessings he was sure to reap in the new life to which he had been summoned. ". . . I am the Resurrection and the Life saith the Lord; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. . . ." I had never before heard these words, and now, with the howling blizzard outside and the quiet grief inside, the hope and consolation they inspired were more than welcome.

As he spoke, there was subdued weeping, and it continued a little more audibly as the family and the visitors filed by the embalmed

body. Of a sudden there was an hysterical cry. It was Glen's sister. In passing the coffin, she broke down and flung herself on the body. At once her older brother and another man lifted her and carried her, choked with sobs, out of the room. Tense with sorrow, I stepped aside to swallow my tears, and I marveled at the other boys, who though bowed with grief remained dry-eyed. Only the elder kept blinking with his eyes and once raised a handkerchief to them. Then the body was carried out. In the midst of his class the elder followed it, his eyes shiny with sorrow.

"The good Lord will take him to His bosom," he mumbled, as if speaking to himself, "and reward him for the joys and privileges he's been denied on this earth, yes, He will, for the Lord is kind and merciful!"

## CHAPTER XVIII

## *The Evangelist*

From day to day Kent was growing more and more restive. The long hours of work during haying and harvesting had sapped his energy and jangled his nerves. Jim's failure to pay wages regularly on the first of the month, or at any other time, added to his exacerbation. Kent had waited all summer to buy a new suit of clothes, new shirts, new collars and ties, and he was still without the money to make the purchases. Deliberately he disobeyed Jim's orders, and he became so recalcitrant that he slept late, and often when he came down to the barn Jim and I had the milking and the cleaning of the stables finished. He growled and swore, and the one pleasure he now had was to sit or lie in his bed and look lengthily at the rich collection of women's photographs which he had cut from magazines and newspapers.

Whenever I tried to cheer him he would reply with vehemence that never again would he hire out "to no damn farmer and waste his life for nothin'." He'd go to the city, find work there and get his money "reg'lar" and spend it as he "had a mind to" and "have as good clothes as anybody." But first he'd go home to his folks on the farm and get some real sleep, just sleep and sleep deep into the

morning, without any thought of cows or chores, rising only for a long enough time to have a meal and then "hit the hay again" until the next meal—and do this for at least a month. Oh boy, how he'd sleep! Only those who have worked on a farm and have had to rise day after day, including Sundays and holidays, with the break of dawn can appreciate Kent's consuming hunger for a long uninterrupted sleep.

Great therefore was my astonishment when, one Sunday morning, Kent flew into our room and asked pantingly:

"Can I borrow your New York suit for the day?"

His face shone with expectancy and delight.

"Going to see a girl?"

"Goin' to an evangelist meetin' in Caldversville."

"No!"

"I sure am," and he dashed over to the closet, took out my suit and said:

"You hain't objectin'?"

I shook my head. Kent's sudden excitement over a religious service baffled me. Often I had importuned him to go to Elder Jepson's church and to the socials of the True Blues, but he steadfastly refused. He wasn't interested "in no church doin's," and there was no use his going to see the pretty girls, because they were too "stuck on themselves." And now he beamed at the prospect of attending an evangelist meeting in Caldversville, which was three miles from Jim's farm.

"Going to get converted?" I asked.

"Don't think so."

"You once told me you weren't meant for religion."

"Maybe I hain't, and maybe I am."

"You're changing, aren't you?"

He gave a shrug and laughed.

"Isn't this sudden?"

"Sure it's sudden, 'cause the Goodfellows just invited me, Nannie and Will. They're visitin' across the way, and they want me to come and take dinner and supper with his folks and go to the meetin', and I sure 'm glad of a chance to get my Sunday vittles at Mrs Goodfellow's. I hain't yet forgotten her ice cream and chocolate layer cake at Will and Nannie's wedding."

Now the mystery of Kent's sudden enthusiasm for the evangelist meeting was clarified. Though no glutton, he was always so thrilled at the prospect of a festive meal in a new place, especially with plenty of dessert, that he acted like a boy starting out on a supreme adventure. At the wedding of Nannie, who was Bill Young's sister, and Will Goodfellow, Kent and I were treated to enormous portions of Mrs Goodfellow's homemade ice cream and chocolate layer cake, and afterwards Kent warbled endless tributes to Mrs Goodfellow's cooking. The thick crusts of chocolate on each layer of the cake, the rich cream and eggs in the ice cream roused him to ecstasy. And now Mrs Goodfellow's son and daughter-in-law had invited him to dinner and supper at their mother's! No wonder he was bursting with glee.

Late in the evening he returned home. Jim and Emilia had already retired. I was awake, reading. Face flushed, eyes lighted up with rapture, he proceeded to narrate with fervor the events of the day. He had met the evangelist and his wife at the Goodfellows', and he had never known "grander folks." The Tuckers, who, like the Goodfellows, were among the leading members of the church that was sponsoring the tent meetings, were also there with their daughter Eve, whom he had never before seen and who had just graduated from Normal and was going to teach school the coming winter. At both meals he sat next to her, and he had never known better company in all his life. She invited him to come and see her, and he promised he would. None of the girls at the Baptist church in Mount Brookville was as pretty as she, and she was not "a bit stuck on herself, neither." Gosh, how he liked her! If he was well fixed, which he wasn't, he would not mind asking her to marry him, and he "kinda had a notion" she would not refuse. He had never thought of marriage seriously, but now he could not help thinking of it. All the way home he was thinking of the girl and wishing she were with him so he could hold his arm round her and never stop kissing her. That was how he was "stuck on her."

Then he described the meals at Mrs Goodfellow's. They had ham and roast chicken and jam and homemade ice cream, saucers heaped with it, and custard and apple pie with the crusts melting in the mouth like candy and just as sweet. Gosh, how he had enjoyed himself! He had never had such a good time in all his life,

and Nannie and Will had said they were coming over to invite me and Bill to come to one of the meetings, and I shouldn't even think of refusing to go. It was worth making the trip just to sit at Mrs Goodfellow's table and eat her vittles. Only I must promise I would start no flirtation with Eve Tucker. He wouldn't like that a bit, not a damned bit. He had met her first and had taken "a shine to her," and she to him, too, and it wouldn't be fair for an outsider to butt in on them, would it?

Kent's confessional surprised me. Never had anyone in Mount Brookville talked to me about himself with such utter lack of restraint. Evidently he was so overcome with joy and expectancy that he could not hold it all back. Manifestly he was a transformed man. The day had been crowded with adventure and triumph. Mrs Goodfellow's vittles, the "grand folks" he had met, above all the acquaintance with Eve Tucker—an avalanche of sensations, such as he had never before known!

"Will you be goin' to the meetin' next Saturday evenin'?" he asked.

"I might if Bill 'll go."

"Sure he will. Nannie and Will are comin' to make him go, and when Nannie starts on somethin' she don't let up until she gets it."

"She's changed a lot, hasn't she?" I asked.

"You ought to hear the preacher talk in open meetin' what bein' converted 's done for her."

I waited for Kent to go on and repeat what the preacher had said. Instead he was evidently thinking of his own plans for the coming Sunday.

He said:

"I'll tell you what. You go with Bill Saturday evenin', and you don't need botherin' about chores, neither. . . . I'll help Jim, so you can get to Mrs Goodfellow's in time for supper, and you don't want to miss that—by heck, you don't—and then Sunday you can help Jim with the chores and I'll go to the meetin', and I can wear your New York suit. How's that?"

Nannie and Will spent all afternoon the next Saturday coaxing Bill to go to the tent meeting. Bill was at first obdurate, and in the end he said he would go if I came along. Instantly Nannie and Will

hastened to ask me, and Kent eagerly joined in the solicitation. With Kent and Nannie holding forth continuously, neither Bill nor I had a chance to say a word. Kent's eloquence amazed me as much as did Nannie's. The tent meetings had obviously loosened their thoughts and their tongues and stirred them into impassioned articulateness. Finally I agreed to go with Bill, and Nannie and Kent bubbled with triumph. Kent was now assured of having my New York suit to himself on Sunday.

Nannie was even more of a revelation than Kent. I had known her since the time of my arrival at Jim's. Always reticent and morose and keeping to herself, she had been a constant source of concern to her father and brother, because she had been "gettin' on to thirty and hain't come to nothin' in life." Now obviously she had come to everything she might want—a husband, a home, friends, a passion for religion, and a flow of eloquence as endless as the gurgle of water in Jim's creek.

When Bill and I arrived at the tent, which was in a meadow in the rear of the church, services had not yet begun. Nannie was the first to see us and fluttered over to welcome us. She wore a white dress and acted as usher. The whiteness of her dress and the excitement that had come to her since she had been converted had transfused her broad and dusky features with a brightness that enhanced her attractiveness and imparted to her something of the wildness and terror of the glowing eye of an animal in the woods at night. Overcome with a sense of triumph, she hastened to bring over the evangelist and his wife and introduce them to us. She assured them that had it not been for brother Kent, the nice young man whom they liked so much, she might never have persuaded her heathen brother and me to come to the meeting. A slender man with heavy dark hair, a thick mustache and in a frock coat, the evangelist was visibly pleased with Kent's enthusiasm for the meetings and spoke in praise of his Christian character. Impatiently Nannie proposed that Bill and I move down to a front seat. The evangelist and his wife joined in the proposal. But Bill said he only had on bib overalls and didn't wish to be conspicuous. The evangelist assured him that in the eyes of the Lord a man in overalls was as good as and better than a man in fine city clothes. But Bill staunchly insisted that he

would rather sit in the rear, since he could see and hear as well as if he were in a front row. Disappointed with her brother's rebuff, Nannie sought to persuade him to change his mind. The evangelist and his wife helped in the coaxing. But Bill was obdurate. When we were left to ourselves he said resentfully:

"They hain't nobody goin' to tell me where I'm a mind to sit. If they done any more coaxin' I'd have plump got up and left the tent and drove home."

Bill's spirit of independence, always robust, was assuming formidable defiance, and I suspected that in his heart he was none too pleased with himself for having yielded to his sister's persuasion to come to the meeting. However, when he was left to himself his hostility quickly subsided.

The evangelist started the sermon. He spoke in a thin voice that often rose to a squeak. He had none of Elder Jepson's tempestuous fluency. Now and then he stuttered, but only at the beginning. He was amazingly calm as he recounted with obvious pleasure his achievements in Caldversville. Here was Mrs Clements—always unhappy and lonely and given to crying—and now she was as cheerful as anybody in the community, and why? Because of her conversion. Here was Mrs Will Goodfellow, who, by her own testimony, had never been interested even in meeting people and who now flamed with a love for all mankind, and why? Because she had taken Him who was all love to her heart. Here was Lamb Fitch, drinking away every penny he ever earned and living by himself in a little hut and in squalor, and now "you all know Lamb and you all heard his testimony—he hasn't touched a drop since he's walked up here and professed his acceptance of Christ." And here was Kent Stafford—Bill gave me a vigorous poke with his elbow—who had attended services only twice, the preceding Sunday morning and evening, and while he hadn't yet been baptized he had already felt the power and the joy of communion with the Lord and had persuaded two of his neighbors to come over and hear the "message of Him who died on the cross so that we here and all men everywhere might be saved." He ended the sermon with a burst of poetic eloquence. What would the sky be like without beautiful sunsets? What would the lilies be like without beautiful coloring? Who'd ever want to look at a sky that was

always dark or at a lily that was no brighter than the stalk of a dried thistle? . . . And what the sunsets were to the sky and the coloring to the lily, the spirit of the Lord was to man—made him fresh, happy and alive—indeed, reborn!

Then came a call for testimonials. Nannie was the first to rise and to proclaim herself one of the happiest women in the world, now that she had discovered the meaning and the glory of God and His love for people like herself, who had never known happiness in her life, and for all mankind. She spoke at length and with an increasing quaver in her voice. When she finished she was so overcome with emotion that her voice choked with sobs. Bill shook his head in astonishment but made no comment. Nannie lapsed into a chair and buried her head in her hands, as if in tears and in prayer. Presently she arose, walked out of her seat and came over to the rear of the bench where Bill and I were sitting, and urged us to rise and give our testimonials.

"I hain't no notion to do no such thing," Bill told her defiantly.

She continued to talk and coax and then threaten us with sorrow, misfortune, ruin if we denied ourselves the guidance of God in all our thoughts and deeds. Neither Bill nor I was impressed with her words. Our obstinacy stirred her to a rising anger, and finally Bill threatened to get up and leave if she didn't stop talking as she did. Hurt and grief-stricken, she walked off, sobbing.

Later, as we were driving home, Bill said:

"No preachin' man can tell me nothin' about no sunsets. There hain't no prettier ones than in the Adirondacks, where I'd lived 'fore I come to Mount Brookville, and the evangelist here he only come from Iowa. I don't need to give no testimony, neither, to show I appreciate pretty sunsets, and that ain't the only pretty things I've seen. Did you ever see mink, a live mink? There's a pretty animal, and damn' smart too, and badgers 's still prettier, only there hain't no more of them in this country, and possum hain't so bad, nor skunks, neither. Nobody round here's seen more pretty things in nature than I, and don't let nobody tell you no different, neither."

"Are you an atheist, Bill?"

"What in hell is that?"

"A man who doesn't believe in God."

"I hain't no such damned fool. Where did you get the notion I might be an unbeliever?"

"I just wondered, that's all."

"Sure, I believe in God, always did, ever since I can remember, but that don't mean I got to get up before a preachin' man and get his consent, does it?"

Bill's words only intensified the impression I had already gained, that religion in Mount Brookville did not necessarily imply a specific creed or a definite church affiliation. It meant that to some people, but to others religion was as private and individual an experience as a business transaction or a marriage proposal. Such a concept of religion was as new to me as the revival that I had just attended. Even more new was the clear-cut dividing line between people like Nannie, who, once converted, were roused to a high pitch of emotional fervor, and those like her brother, who resented the infusion of emotion into religion. Strangely enough, Nannie was intolerant of Bill, but Bill was tolerant of everybody. This too was new and thought-provoking.

One Sunday evening Kent flew into the room flushed with excitement.

"What d'you suppose I done?"

"You haven't married Eve Tucker?"

"No, sir, I got converted!"

"You did?"

"Yes, sir, three of us went down the creek and got baptized, and now I'm a church member, and it sure feels good."

"Congratulations," I said.

"If you'd sell me your New York suit, I'd be goin' to church in Caldversville reg'lar every Sunday."

"It's the only suit I have, Kent."

"I know it, but I thought you might want to sell it and I'd pay you when Jim pays me and you could buy yourself a new suit."

"It doesn't look as though Jim's goin' to have money so soon to pay you or me."

"I know different. He's goin' to sell his hops 's soon as he gets them picked. I heard Emilia say so."

"Then you can buy yourself a suit."

"And I'm a-goin' to, as soon as I get the money. Only now I hain't got nothin' to wear on Sundays 'cept my overalls, and I can't go to church in overalls."

"You're still sweet on Eve Tucker?"

"I sure am, more than ever."

I agreed to let him wear my suit on those Sundays when I didn't use it.

One Sunday evening when I came home from the barn after chores I found Kent lying in my suit on the bed with his head dug into the pillow. He never stirred when I walked in.

"Kent?"

He didn't answer.

"Are you asleep?"

He shook his head without lifting it from the pillow.

"You don't seem very cheerful."

"I ain't."

"What's happened?"

"Nothin'."

Obviously he was in no mood to speak of his troubles. But my curiosity was uncontrollable.

"Have you had a fight with Eve Tucker?"

"I hain't talkin'."

"Why not?"

"I said *I hain't talkin',*" he answered with irritation.

I asked no more questions. But I did not like to see my suit mussed up, and so I said:

"It's not doing my New York suit any good for you to be lying in it."

He arose forthwith, took off the suit, hung it up in the closet and crawled into bed. After a pause he said:

"I hain't goin' to need it no more."

"Why not?"

He made no answer.

"You aren't quitting church, are you?"

Again he remained silent. After a pause I said lightly:

"I'll bet you *did* have a fight with Eve Tucker?"

"I hain't talkin', I told you," he cried as he turned his face to the wall and drew a sheet over himself.

It was obvious that he had suffered a crushing humiliation, and that only Eve Tucker, to whom he was deeply devoted, could have inflicted it in so mighty a fashion. Had he asked her to marry him and been summarily rejected, or had he only attempted to kiss her and been brutally rebuffed? His misery and his reluctance to talk kept me from asking further questions.

Shortly afterwards he quit working for Jim.

Autumn was upon us, the most amazing autumn I had ever known. Neither the maple nor the elm nor the basswood lost their verdure as swiftly and completely as did the birch and the ash in the old village, where autumn descended almost overnight with the fury of an evil conqueror. There, in a few days every vestige of summer was gone. The skies were dark, the rains, now light, now heavy, never ceased, or ceased only for brief intervals. The sun seldom came out, the muds grew more and more soft, more and more deep, and when the rains ceased as suddenly as they began, frost and snow invaded the earth and we got ready for a long and difficult winter.

In Mount Brookville, nature was indulgent. The crispness in the air added zest to living. Grass and freshly risen clover were slow in changing color—like a canvas in process of being painted. Evenings and mornings, sky and hills gleamed with tints of gold, yellow, scarlet, emerald, and the exquisite blue that hung or floated in waves, like something joyously alive, over the tops of trees. During the day the sun was often as hot as in summer, and evenings the skies glowed with choppy gold or flamed with fiery scarlet. I had never imagined that autumn could be as beautiful as it was in Mount Brookville.

Finally Jim and I had cleared our fields of all crops and began to prepare for winter. We packed the bees in straw and chaff, not of course without first making sure that every hive had enough honey to survive the months of confinement and somnolence. We banked the house with horse manure and made our cider, which Jim treated with milk and mustard so as to keep it sweet and yet potent. The mornings got so cold that it was agony to get out of bed for chores. I envied Kent his flight from cows and his enjoyment of long nights and long mornings of sleep. The work on the farm was growing

more and more leisurely, and I enrolled in the local school and began in earnest to prepare for college.

One Sunday Elder Jepson announced to his congregation that Dr William Walford, one of the most famous Baptist evangelists, was coming to Mount Brookville for a revival campaign of three weeks. Dr Walford would bring his own choir director, who also sang and played the cornet as few musicians he had ever heard. Never before, the elder went on with gusto, had Mount Brookville enjoyed so rare a privilege of showing its appreciation of one of the foremost preachers in the country, and he was hopeful that the church would be crowded to the doors every evening. He appealed to the congregation to spread the happy news all over the countryside and to persuade not only members of their families but neighbors to come and hear the great preacher. The announcement caused no little stir in the community.

The Reverend Doctor Walford was an old man of seventy with snow-white hair and a short snow-white beard. The lids of his large and resolute gray eyes were red, as though he were given to weeping. Indeed, hearing him speak, especially when he was roused to emotion, one might imagine that tears came easily to him, for his voice quavered and he nodded continuously, as people sometimes do when they are in mourning. Yet the lightness of his step, the sprightliness of his manner, the melody of his voice bespoke a temper to which tears were as alien as to Jim who "hain't never cried" and wasn't "a-goin' to, neither." I heard him on the Sunday on which he arrived, and was impressed with the ease, the simplicity, the earnestness with which he spoke. He had none of Elder Jepson's vehemence and wasn't given to violent gesturing. Leaning on the pulpit, and only now and then standing upright and lifting a forefinger over his head, he spoke with an unpretentiousness and an intimacy which made people feel as though he were addressing, not a congregation, but each one of them personally. His English was more opulent than that of Elder Jepson and his knowledge of the lore of farming equally rich and varied. Words rolled out of him with astonishing ease, and there was a lyrical fervor in the man,

especially when he told a story, that made me think of beggars in the old village who were noted storytellers. I had the feeling that here was a man who could address any audience anywhere and win their acclaim even if they didn't agree with a word he said.

Elder Jepson glowed with triumph and during his Sunday-school lesson effervesced with praise for the old evangelist and prophesied a sweep of religion over the hills and valleys of a kind that Mount Brookville had never witnessed in all its history.

To me the evangelistic meetings were of less importance than my studies, and I stayed home evenings and spent my leisure with my books. Besides, revivals interested me merely as a part of the civilization and the experience of the America in which I was living, and I didn't feel that further attendance would enrich my appreciation of this experience. Yet subsequently, when Elder Jepson sent word that he wanted me to come to Dr Walford's farewell meeting, I decided to go.

Tim Milburn, a youth of my own age, had received a similar invitation, and in passing Jim's house he stopped and asked me to go to the meeting with him. Gladly I assented.

Tim lived in the hills far away and was a member of the True Blue class; at least he never missed a social, though he seldom attended church services or even Sunday school. Short, muscular, with soft blond hair and deep blue eyes, he was inclined to be reticent when in a crowd, especially if girls were around, but was quite talkative in the company of close friends. A skilled marksman and an indefatigable trapper, Tim seldom hired out in winter, but spent his time roaming the hills and the woods in search of game. Only Bill Young seemed to know more about mink and skunks and muskrat and possum and foxes and rabbits and pheasants and other wild life in Mount Brookville. The son of a large family, with a father who seemed born to misfortune, Tim kept very little of the money he earned for himself. Most of it he gave to his mother, in whose business judgment he had greater confidence than in that of his beaten father. He seldom bought new clothes, which might explain his reluctance to take girls home after socials or to call on them evenings at their homes or to join in the kissing games at the True Blue gatherings.

"I kind o' wonder," he said, as his cutter was gliding swiftly over the solidly packed track in the snow, "if we hain't better take seats in back?"

"Suits me," I said.

"I don't never like sittin' in front in church, an' if Elder Jepson asks us to move forward we'll tell him we'd rather not. And we won't let him persuade us no different."

"We won't," I said.

When we entered the church the back seats were already crowded all the way down to the fourth row. Tim was disconcerted that he had to sit so far forward, in full view of Dr Walford, Elder Jepson, the leader of the choir, and all the other people on the rostrum. So was I. But there was no other place for us. On seeing us, Elder Jepson came over, shook hands and thanked us for coming. He hoped the True Blues would be out in full force.

The preliminary services over, the Reverend Doctor Walford commenced his sermon. Again I was impressed with the ease and unpretentiousness with which he spoke and with the melodious resonance of his voice. Listening to him was a pleasure, even if neither his ideas nor his pleas evoked approval. He spoke at length of his childhood and of his mother's love for him and what it had meant to him in all the years of his life. As he warmed to his subject he grew increasingly sentimental and now and then I could see women in the congregation wiping their eyes. In this part of his sermon he made me think of the itinerant Hebrew preachers who visited the synagogues of the little town in which I had attended school in Russia. They too brimmed over with sentiment when they spoke of elemental emotions and simple virtues. Indeed, the more I listened to the preaching of local Protestant clergymen, the more impressed I was with the deep Hebraic tinge in their thinking, and this in spite of a theology that was alien and repugnant to Jews. No Orthodox Jewish rabbi, for example, could be more ecstatic in his praise of filial devotion and mother love than was Dr Walford. Only, Jewish women would have wept copiously, while these Protestant women didn't even sob but now and then lifted a handkerchief to their eyes.

With mother love as a foundation, Dr Walford proceeded to speak of God's love, which was man's for the asking from the

moment he arrived in the world, through all his conflicts and sorrows, to the moment he passed away to a better life.

"Oh, if only we would open our hearts to Him and say, 'Most merciful, most magnanimous, most loving Father! Abide with me always, so that in days of sunshine and in days of darkness mine eyes shall be illumined and my soul shall be elevated by the glow of Your eternal and inexhaustible love!' "

When he finished, his face was flushed and sweat rolled freely from his brow. The congregation had obviously been deeply stirred by his message. Then came a call for testimonials, and pleas for all those to rise who never again wanted to live without the companionship of Christ and His love. At once I felt a violent pinch in my thigh. It was Tim.

"Don't you get up," he whispered.

I shook my head.

More and more people arose. All those who sat in the front pew were on their feet, and more and more of those who sat in other pews were standing up, and the more of them that did so, the greater was the joy in Dr Walford's face, and the more eloquent was his plea to others to do likewise. All around us people had risen, but Tim and I remained as if chained to our seats. Again I felt the pinch of Tim's powerful fingers.

"Don't you get up," he whispered once more.

Finally the whole congregation, except Tim and myself, were on their feet. Had we been sitting in the rear we should have quietly slipped out, but we were in the fourth row, squeezed in by people on all sides, and to avoid giving offense to Dr Walford we remained where we were. Presently Elder Jepson, Dr Walford, the leader of the choir and many others fixed on us eager and impatient eyes. We felt awkward but made no move to comply with the evangelist's plea. The Professor (principal of the local school), though not a member of Elder Jepson's church—he was a Seventh Day Adventist—approached us and earnestly pleaded with us to show our respect for the good old man and rise to our feet with the rest of the congregation. Harder than ever did I feel the pinch of Tim's powerful hand, and though in the presence of the Professor he refrained from saying a word, I knew the resolute meaning of his pinch. The Professor left in a state of sullen agitation.

Then Dr Walford called on the congregation to pray for the regeneration of those in their midst who were too young to understand the nature and meaning of their action in holding out against the blessings of a love which all other men and women in church were happy to profess and to accept. Overcome with embarrassment, Tim and I fixed our eyes on the floor, and more than ever were we resolved not to be stampeded into the response that was demanded of us. In my heart I wondered why two youths of seventeen, who had come by invitation of the elder of the church, had all of a sudden become such a source of solicitude and anxiety to so eminent a man as Dr Walford. Presently I was to learn the reason. Elder Jepson himself disclosed it. Eyes flashing with displeasure, he bounded over to us, and the moment he leaned close I felt a continuous and full-handed pinching of my hip.

"Boys, please," begged the elder, "it's only a small thing we're askin' of you, to stand up with the rest of us and give Dr Walford a record of a hundred-per-cent victory for God."

Neither Tim nor I answered. Instead I felt as if a steel clamp had tightened on my hip. I winced with pain and quickly disengaged Tim's hand from all contact with my flesh. Again the elder spoke with supplication, with censure, but to no avail.

When he was gone Mrs Schupps came over. Tim and I knew her well, as did everyone who passed her house, which rose sheer above the street and nestled in the leafage of a tall maple. In front of her house was a watering trough that was a boon to man and horse. Fed by an inexhaustible spring in the hills it always overflowed with pure cool water which men loved no less than horses and which never froze, no matter how far below zero was the temperature. It was known as the Schupps watering trough. The gray-haired and loquacious lady's heart spilled over with religious emotion no less boundlessly than her trough with spring water. I shrank back a little as I saw her stopping at our pew, but Tim faced her courageously.

"Boys," she began in a voice of subdued resentment, "you're disgracing yourself before God and man, and there's no excuse for it. If the Lord 's willin' to give you His love just for the askin', who 're you to refuse it? Up, up," and she took hold of Tim's arm and sought to lift him, but he wrenched it loose and dropped it to his side. Angrily this time Tim whispered:

"They hain't goin' to change my mind nohow, no matter what they do, and don't you let them change yours, neither."

"I won't," I assured him with a feeling of close comradeship.

The next morning at the milk station John Roadsdell smiled gloatingly and said:

"I heard you and Tim hain't behaved proper at the meetin' last night."

"Who told you?"

"Mrs Schupps hain't yet quit talkin' about it," and he gave a loud laugh.

"I guess," he went on, "the ol' man hain't feelin' so good in not gettin' a hundred-per-cent record in this town. I wish I might've been there to see you boys refusin' to stand up."

It was obvious that John heartily approved of our action.

I thought that Elder Jepson would never forgive Tim and me our conspicuous defiance of his and Dr Walford's pleas and wishes. But I didn't know the elder as well as I thought I did. The next time he saw me in the post office he was as warm and ebullient in his greetings as though I had been among the first to respond to Dr Walford's call for the acceptance of the Lord's love. Not once did he allude to the subject. Instead he told me that the Ladies' Aid were planning a supper to raise money for foreign missions and had asked him to get the True Blues to put on the literary program.

"I thought," he went on, "this time we might be having a debate, and I was wondering if you'd take the affirmative of the subject: Resolved: That Anticipation Is Better Than Realization."

## CHAPTER XIX

### *Girls*

PAULETTE WAS THE FIRST GIRL I had met in Mount Brookville. She was also the first American girl who had roused in me "exalted emotion." Her full-lipped mouth, white teeth, shimmering dark brown

hair, her poise and friendliness, her seeming interest in me—when she learned I was preparing for college she never failed to ask how I was getting on with my studies—evoked endless and pleasurable agitation. Going now and then to the True Blue class and to its biweekly socials had become more than a search for an understanding of the America in which I was living and for the satisfaction of a yearning for comradeship with young people. It had assumed the quality of an emotional exhilaration. I shouldn't have walked to church as often as I did had it not been that I always hoped to see Paulette and to talk to her. Elder Jepson's repetitious emphasis of theological dogma ceased to be an annoyance if Paulette was on the platform, especially if she sat beside me. I glowed in the proximity of her presence. Now and then I whispered in her ear and searched her eyes and thrilled to her friendly glances and her understanding smiles.

One evening I was to join the True Blues for a drive in a bobsled to the home of a girl who lived across the nine-mile swamp. I walked from the farm to the church shed, where the team was to wait, and had barely hopped into the hay-loaded bobsled when the driver pulled the lines and shouted "Giddap." All the seats were taken and, clutching with one hand at the rear end of the box to steady myself, I remained on my feet. Thereupon Paulette turned to me and said:

"You take my seat and I'll sit in your lap."

Riven with joy and trepidation, I sidled into her seat, and when she sat down in my lap I wondered what, if any, was my further obligation to her. Was I to minister to her pleasure and further show my appreciation of the privilege she had so bravely and graciously conferred on me? If so, were words alone sufficient, even if spoken in a whisper for her alone to hear? Never having previously been in such a situation with an American girl, the problem had never before presented itself. The solution would have been easy had there been another boy in the bobsled with a girl in his lap. I should then have followed his example, put my arms around my companion, snuggled my face close to hers, or remained visibly aloof from all needless proximity, as the etiquette of the occasion might require. My wishes in the matter were obviously a guide I dared not trust, for with all my heart I yearned to draw Paulette

closer. Likewise Elder Jepson's moral precepts were of no help. How could they be, when in the pulpit he thundered condemnation of dancing and at socials he boisterously approved of kissing games and only because, as he had so genially explained, "I used to play them myself when I was a boy"? With heroic fortitude I followed the line of least resistance and held my hands and arms and face at an uncomfortable distance from Paulette.

I was glad that I was not alone with her, for then my confusion would have completely unsettled me. I should hardly have known what to say to her. Not that I was incapable of giving utterance to the sentiments with which I was at the moment filled, but because bitter experience had taught me that I could take nothing for granted in Mount Brookville. Having sentiments was one thing, couching them in acceptable and agreeable language was quite another. The usage and idiom of Mount Brookville in all departments of human experience were still largely alien to me. I was only beginning to acquire a knowledge of them. Indeed, the struggle for this knowledge had now reached a momentous stage—that of my relations with girls. I was therefore pleased that Elder Jepson was in the bobsled. With his love of sociability and his fund of stories he could be depended upon to keep the conversation within channels of general interest, so that we should be talking not for the special edification of an immediate neighbor but for the amusement of the crowd.

My old heritage had ill prepared me for comradeship with American girls. Besides, I had left the old village at an age when I was only beginning to become keenly aware of girls. I had observed grown young people at dances, socials, festivals, *nochleg* and in the town where I had attended school, and had thus learned the code and the folkways that governed their relations with one another. It was the only code and the only folkways I knew, and they ill suited the demands and exigencies of an American society, even in as remote a community as Mount Brookville.

Here at every step I was aware of barriers between the sexes that the very primitiveness of the old village had made impossible. Peasant girls, for example, worked side by side with men in the fields and in barns. They slept in the same room with their fathers,

brothers, other men—guests who might be visiting them or strangers who might be putting up for the night. They therefore grew up with a robust sense of equality and had something of the manner of boys and men. At a dance, if a boy tiptoed over to a girl and pulled her braid, she was likely to retaliate with a slap on his face, even if the boy had intended the act merely as a gesture of playfulness. In Mount Brookville a girl of ten or eleven might indulge in such an outburst of pugnacity, but not a girl of fifteen or more. An older girl might protest more or less vigorously; most likely she would pass off the incident as the jest that it was intended to be. She was beyond all thought of physical retaliation.

When I first saw Paulette sitting beside Alexis in his huge milk rack she wore a hat. All the girls of her age wore hats when they went to church Sunday mornings. The mere possession of a hat by Paulette and other girls was to me a symbol not only of a vastly higher economic condition than the old village could boast, but of a vastly more innate feminine consciousness, and the hat was only one of manifold accessories that continuously accentuated in American girls awareness of their sex. And so did the care which they bestowed on their hands and on their complexions. They might go berry picking, help in the house, get a mess of peas or lettuce in the garden, always with bonnets on their heads to protect their faces from the sun, but they scrupulously refrained from tasks that might blister or coarsen their hands. Their complexions they nursed with as much assiduity as their reputations.

Not so with the girls in the old village. Their hands were as coarse from hard labor as those of boys, and their faces were as burned from constant exposure to sun. Good health and outdoor work kept them, in their young years, flushed and ruddy But after marriage, with the host of fresh burdens that they faced, with the tasks of motherhood unrelieved by outside aid and mounting continuously if only because of frequent childbirth—as frequent, indeed, as the laws of nature, unmolested by science, allowed—their figures like their spirits drooped, and their comeliness was ruined. The anguish that the frequent epidemics caused them, attacking and crippling and snuffing the lives out of their children, was of no aid in the rehabilitation of their looks or their spirits.

Nor did men make conspicuous efforts to foster in them aware-

ness of their sex. In the presence of girls they spoke with hardly any more restraint than in the presence of male companions; and the older they were, the less delicate was their language. In Mount Brookville nothing was more improper and more reprehensible. The most profane man would resent with word or fist an untoward remark in the presence of a lady, young or old.

Nor were men in the old village given to showing many special courtesies to girls. In their daily vicissitudes girls were supposed to look after themselves. It could hardly be otherwise in a society in which a woman had to labor for her living no less earnestly than a man. A girl who carried on her back as heavy sacks of grain as a man or dug potatoes beside him with a spade was neither in need of being helped into a seat in a wagon nor capable of appreciating the courtesy. But in Mount Brookville men went out of their way to render little services to women, as much out of a desire to assist and to please them as out of the stimulation they derived from their effort. Chivalry was an alien word to the men and the women in the old village. In Mount Brookville it was an institution as deeply entrenched as apple pie or shortcake during the time when berries were in season. It took time to discover the nature and meaning of the institution and even more to become versed in the exercise of the usages and precepts to which it had given rise.

Once while in the post office a girl asked if she might ride home with me. She was one of Paulette's close friends, and I had met her often at socials. She lived halfway between the village and the farm on which I was working. I told her to hop into the buggy. It never occurred to me to take her by the arm and help her inside. On the way the buggy lurched into a mudhole and plastered us with mud. Calmly and self-assuredly I proceeded to wipe my clothes, with no thought of helping the girl clean hers. Only afterwards, while on the way to a social with a crowd of young people, when all of us were similarly plastered and I saw the boys hasten with their handkerchiefs to wipe the mud off the coats of the girls, did I realize the error I had committed.

In the old village, boys jested with girls, flirted with them, kissed them in public without the subterfuge of playing a game. They never had bothered to cultivate an approach, a manner, an idiom of speech designed for the special delectation of girls. Here, when

boys talked to girls, they sought to outdo each other in the liveliness of their language and in the sheer fun they could provide. They spilled over with exuberance and twitted the girls, and the girls responded with equal exuberance and with no less skill in chatter and repartee. Inordinate was the amount of "emotional kidding" that passed between boys and girls in Mount Brookville. Both knew, as if by instinct, which words to take literally and from which to peel off all earnest intent, and for the most part conversation was void of such intent, anyway. To me, with my Old World literal-mindedness and my greater maturity, such conversation was a continual perplexity, and unless I checked myself in time, efforts at imitation resulted only in embarrassment and pain. Here, obviously, girls were young ladies, and the boys were as aware of it as they. In the old village, girls were pre-eminently fellow workers and were no less aware of it than were boys.

In the town in Russia where I went to school, girls were also young ladies, especially if they were attending the Gymnasium, but even they lacked the lighthearted sophistication of the girls in Mount Brookville. Their youth was as short-lived as the Russian autumn. At thirteen or fourteen they knew by heart the letter of Pushkin's heroine Tatayana to her lover Onegin and were already weeping over the fate of Turgenev's heroes and heroines. They discovered torment and sadness at a tender age and, once initiated into both, even if only over the tragedies of others, of literary characters, their skies were overcast with clouds that no sun, however brilliant, could completely scatter. At parties they might dress in gay Cossack uniforms, with daggers thrust in their belts, and dance Cossack jigs and sing merry Ukrainian ditties, but the woes of maturity and of the world, even if not yet stamped on their bright faces, had already seeped into their blood. In Mount Brookville, boys and girls were guarded against the inroads of maturity to a time much beyond adolescence, and the meaning of *Weltschmerz* they never discovered.

Once I ran into Paulette at the railroad station and walked home with her—a distance of about half a mile. With her usual charm and friendliness she asked about my studies, and after answering her question I was at a loss to continue the conversation. I wanted

desperately not only to talk but to express myself in the idiom to which she had been accustomed—to amuse, exhilarate, enlighten—and my mind teemed with subjects that I felt might interest her. Yet no sooner did I formulate a phrase or a sentence than I sensed its inappropriateness and hastened to dismiss it. So we walked on in silence, and when it grew too awkward, out of mere politeness she would ask another question. No sooner would I answer it than I would feel a fresh paralysis of the tongue. I could have whipped myself for my utter failure to take advantage of the opportunity for which I had longed to make my appreciation of her known and to waken in her a somewhat similar appreciation of me. When we reached her house she invited me to come in, and there was nothing in the world I yearned for more, but sheer disgust because of my incapacity to make myself companionable impelled me to excuse myself and to walk cheerlessly back to the farm.

I wondered why it was that when in a crowd, as at a social, I could talk as freely and sometimes as effervescently as any other boy to Paulette and to other girls, but when I was alone with her or any other girl, my tongue froze and words caught in the throat. That was why, whenever I saw Paulette in the store or in the post office, I never mustered enough courage to ask if I could walk home with her, as other boys did when they ran into their girls or some other girl they might like. Nor did I ever make the least effort to call on her in her home, though I never walked or drove by without experiencing a flutter of emotion and without hoping that she might come out of the door or peer out of the window, so that I could wave my hand to her and see her smile and wave back to me. I never joined in the kissing games of the True Blue class, because I saw neither sense nor pleasure in kissing any girl in such public fashion. Yet I often wished that I might be alone with Paulette in the parlor of her home, hold her hands, embrace her and kiss her full-lipped mouth and her tender and vivid eyes.

The overwhelming impression that *Jude the Obscure* had made on me only intensified my wariness of American girls. I had so firmly resolved to attend the State College of Agriculture at Cornell that I quaked at the prospect of a disruption of the plan. I had the

example of Jude before me. Perhaps my inability to bring to any fruition the vast affection that I cherished for Paulette caused me to seize with convenience and enthusiasm on the example of Jude as a salve to wounded pride and as a vindication of social ineptitude. But the example was there floating before my eyes; now and then, especially if I thought of it too seriously, stabbing at my heart. Had not Arabella and Sue stepped into his life, Jude might have attained the ambition of his youth and stormed open the forbidding portals of Christminster College. Of course I was no Jude. My antecedents and training were different, nor was Paulette or any other girl I knew an Arabella or a Sue. Yet I couldn't banish from my mind the horror of Jude's defeat, or the horror of a possible collapse of the ambition that was consuming me. Fortified by this fresh consideration, I did not feel so bad about my inability to make of myself the kind of companion for Paulette which in my heart I yearned to be.

Then Lint Babcock appeared on the scene. Of medium height, with sparse blond hair, a lofty forehead, a broad, sharp-featured face and dreamy blue eyes, Lint was much older than any of the boys in the class of True Blues. His parents were dead, and he lived with an older unmarried sister on a large and finely cultivated farm. In fact, it was one of the best farms in Mount Brookville. Lint's father had grown rich on hops, and no young man in the countryside was in so comfortable a material condition as Lint. I often met him at the milk station or passed him on the road, and I was always impressed with his manner of polite reserve and with the intellectual expression of his face. He was the acme of courtesy and good manners. Several times I had seen him receive mail in the post office, and I noticed metropolitan magazines and newspapers. Were it not for his age, neither the young people nor the older folk would have regarded his presence in Elder Jepson's class any more than the normal urge of a young person to join in the activities of the only gathering of young people in the village. But Lint was conspicuously older. He belonged in the pews, perhaps in Mrs Schupps's Sunday-school class, and not on the platform with the True Blues. Besides, he had never before been known to come to services, not even to the sermons or lectures of missionaries from

foreign lands. Lint must have been aware of the speculation his presence had aroused, for he looked embarrassed and never said a word to any of his immediate neighbors.

No sooner was the class over than he walked out with Paulette, and when they were outside the door he took her arm. Now his motive was as clear as the water that flowed into Mrs Schupps's watering trough, and to nobody so emphatically as to me.

Was he in love with Paulette? Was she in love with him? Of course it was easy for any youth to fall in love with so sensible and friendly and superior a girl, but he had always known her, had seen her in the street, in the post office, in the store, in the homes of friends, yet had never seemed aware of her transcendent attractiveness—why, then, the sudden excitement now? Questions without end flitted through my mind and gave me endless anxiety, even though I knew how unjustified was my feeling of jealousy. After all, I had never mustered the courage to make the girl aware of my fondness of her. Besides, with years of study ahead of me, and my fear of an emotional entanglement, lest it bring to an inglorious defeat a long-cherished ambition and ruin my future, there was no likelihood of my allowing ardor to outweigh caution. Still I hoped that Paulette would not become seriously attached even to as exemplary a young man as Lint Babcock.

But my hopes were doomed. Lint came to class every Sunday morning, always with Paulette. After class he walked home with her, always holding her by the arm. Evenings Paulette ceased coming to church. She stayed home and entertained Lint.

One evening at a social I braved myself to ask Anne Darnell to drive home with me. I had been at the home of the Darnells, and her mother had often invited me to come to their house, and next to Paulette I had spoken more often to Anne than to any other girl. Besides, we were in the same English class in school. To my immense joy Anne accepted my invitation.

Short, chubby, with apple-flushed cheeks, a round face, a broad mouth and brilliant blue eyes, Anne had neither the poise nor the maturity of Paulette, though both were of the same age. When Paulette smiled I knew, or thought I knew, that it conveyed friendliness; when Anne smiled I often wondered if it didn't conceal

mockery. Yet I liked Anne and enjoyed sitting on the same front bench with her during English lessons.

Spring was already upon us, the roads were muddy, especially in the valleys and off the main highways, where they were studded with water holes. Rain and wind beat down on us, and to protect ourselves I pulled down the top of the buggy all the way and buckled up the leather apron. It was the first time that Anne and I had been alone and, as with Paulette, speech failed me, especially the lighthearted banter which I thought she expected. I said a few innocuous words about Elder Jepson and some of the other people at the social, and she responded briefly. Then came silence. I knew I had to talk to her, but what was I to say and how was I to say it? I racked my mind, and finally in sheer desperation I said:

"Have you prepared your English lesson for tomorrow?"

"No," came a curt reply.

"D'you like *Julius Caesar?*"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I never liked Shakespeare."

Manifestly she was bored. There was no use saying anything to her about *Jude the Obscure* or any other Hardy novel that I had read, or about Jim's favorite author, Mary J. Holmes. The knowledge that when in the company of other boys she laughed and chattered and was the soul of merriment, while now with me beside her she seemed steeped in moroseness, caused me no end of pique.

At last we reached her home. I drove into the yard, and hardly had I said "Whoa!" to the horse when Anne hopped out of the buggy. After mounting the porch she faced about and, in a subdued voice that quivered with indignation, she exclaimed:

"Maurice, you wouldn't kiss a girl even if you had a chance, would you?"

Without waiting for an answer—or was it an apology she expected?—which I was in no condition to offer, anyway, she fled into the house and slammed the door.

Covered with shame and disappointment, I drove home, and when I lay in bed, smarting from the insult which I knew was not

unjustified, I vowed that if ever I should find myself alone with Anne I should kiss her so violently that she would cry for mercy.

It had become evident that Lint was intending to marry Paulette, and no one took it so much to heart as Alec Burwill, Paulette's stepfather, who had brought her up and had been father and mother to her. Tall, muscular, with immense shoulders, a thick neck, a ruddy face, and unruly black locks streaked with gray tumbling out from under his cap, Alec had no farm of his own. He lived in the village, owned the best team of horses, was as skilled a teamster as the village could boast of, equally competent in the field with a plow and in the swamp with a sled skidding logs. If ever he was idle it was out of preference, for he always had more jobs offered to him than he could accept.

Alec's weakness was drink, and Saturday evenings he couldn't stay away from the saloon. Often when he drank more than he knew he should, he staggered home, stole into his bed so noiselessly that if Paulette was asleep she never saw or heard him. Alec knew that she objected to his drinking, and there was nothing he loathed more than to cause her pain. But he could only fight the habit without conquering it. The story went round—I had first heard it from Jim—that at times, if Paulette learned that he was in the saloon and went there, the moment he saw her he arose and, without bothering to finish his drink, followed her without a murmur to the house. There was nothing and nobody in the world Alec loved so much as his stepdaughter, and though he only worked for wages he was lavish with the money he spent on her. One reason she was so attractive was her superior taste in dress and the means she had of satisfying it. All the pent-up sentiment in Alec Burwill's sturdy heart went out to her.

When Lint started courting Paulette, Alec said nothing. He had never been noted for his articulateness. A man of his word, he loved neither to argue nor to be argued with, and would neither address a reproach to others nor tolerate a reproach to himself except from Paulette. She had told him of Lint's courtship and he made no reply. He would say nothing to upset the girl. Whenever Lint came he was friendly, and Lint in turn was always polite to him. Perhaps he had been growing aware of the hopelessness of his battle against

drink. Perhaps the thought of losing Paulette and remaining alone in the world, with no one near to restrain him, only weakened his will power. One morning he was discovered in the barn—hanging from a rope, with all the life gone out of him.

Two boys were hitching up teams in the church shed, one a horse and cutter, the other two horses and a bobsled. One boy was tall, with a large mouth, reddish hair, a freckled face and of about my age; the other was short, with flushed cheeks, handsome eyes, a happy manner, and he looked younger. I had never seen them before, and now I spoke to them. They asked if I was going to hear the missionary speak on India, and I said I was.

"Where do you come from?" I asked.

"We've just moved down from Canada," answered the younger boy, whose name was Eden.

"The whole family?"

"Yes, the whole family."

The moment I entered the church and saw the two boys take seats in a pew occupied by a group of strangers, I realized that people in Canada were no more averse to having large families than were people in the old village. Here were father, mother, grandfather and more girls than I had seen in any one household in Mount Brookville. It was cheering to discover such a large family, with the members seemingly held together by ties of close intimacy. Their name was Candy, and they were spoken of as the Candy family.

When the lecture was over and members of the True Blues ascended the platform, a whole tribe of Candys, including the two boys I had met, followed along. One of them, a girl, seemed as if born to incessant joy. Short, alert, with soft brown hair, sprightly blue eyes, she made herself at home the moment she mounted the rostrum. Quickly she learned the names of the other boys and girls and addressed them familiarly by their first names. I had never seen a girl so aglow with cheer and friendliness. Watching her in the midst of True Blues, one would have imagined that it was not her first attendance at the class but that she had always been a member and had always lived in Mount Brookville. When the elder started the lesson and asked questions she was among the

first to volunteer answers, and seldom did she err. As I watched her animated expression I couldn't help being attracted to her, and I only wished that, instead of having her long hair done into a knob, she had had it woven into a braid in the style of girls in the old village. It would have added immeasurably to the vigor and vividness of her little person.

At the close of the lesson there was a discussion of the next social, where it was to be held, who was to bring the refreshments, and who was to furnish the team for the drive.

"Why not come to our house?" said the Candy girl. Her name was Dorothy, and it was impossible not to call her Dot. I glanced at her with increasing admiration and yet with concern. She couldn't have been more than sixteen, and here she was, on her own initiative and without consulting her mother, inviting the class to a social in her home! I had not yet outgrown the Old World tradition that forbade young people to make decisions or assume responsibilities that might involve the family without first obtaining parental consent. But Dot had done it with neither hesitancy nor qualms, and on further observance I could readily understand that there could be no conflict between her and her father or her mother over the invitation in question or over anything that concerned her. Her cheery self-confidence and her good-humored earnestness precluded the possibility of conflict.

On the appointed evening, when we gathered at the Candy home, we discovered to our chagrin that the "literary program" was in a state of collapse. The girl who had agreed to sing was so hoarse that she could hardly even speak, and the girl who had prepared a special recitation was laid up with a fever. Elder Jepson wondered what we could do on the spur of the moment to retrieve the wrecked program.

"Why not have a debate?" exclaimed Dot.

"Without preparation?" questioned the elder.

"Why not? We often had impromptu debates in Nova Scotia."

"Shall we try it?" asked the elder, turning to the assemblage.

"I won't mind taking one side of the subject," Dot retorted, with such genial self-confidence that all of us looked at her with admiration.

"I won't mind taking the other side," I blurted out quickly, more

for the sake of making an impression on Dot than of upholding the literary prestige of the social.

"Excellent!" exclaimed the happy elder. "What subject shall we debate?"

"We can't debate whether Washington is a greater man than Lincoln, because we already debated the subject," I remarked, "and we can't debate on whether anticipation is better than realization, because we debated that, too."

"Suppose," Dorothy broke in, "we debate whether life on a farm is better than in the city?"

"Wonderful subject," said the elder and, turning to me, he said, "I suppose, since you lived in New York before you came here, you'll be glad to take the side of the city?"

"I'll take any side," Dot volunteered.

"Would you take the side of the city?" I asked her.

She nodded with a breezy eagerness.

"All right then," I said, "I'll take the side of the farm."

The elder suggested that we retire for five minutes to prepare our arguments. I withdrew to one room, Dot to another, and I was more preoccupied with thoughts of her than of my arguments.

The judges were the elder, the postmaster's daughter, and one of Dot's sisters, a handsome, dark-haired girl, older than Dot. When the debate was finished, the judges retired for a conference, and when they returned they announced a split decision, two in favor of Dot, one in my favor. Later I discovered that Dot's sister had cast her vote for me, so as to absolve herself from the suspicion of favoritism. No sooner was the decision announced than Dot skipped over, pressed my hand and said jubilantly:

"It was a grand debate—you should have got the decision."

The sportsmanship of the girl, her vivacity, self-confidence, her ready speech, her inordinate capacity for comradeship, stirred me deeply, and again I wondered if anything was to come of it. My experiences with Paulette and Anne had taught me only too painfully how unqualified I was to pursue other than a purely impersonal friendship with any girl in Mount Brookville. I had neither the manner nor the idiom for any other relationship. I had not grown into these like the other boys in Mount Brookville, and I hadn't yet had the time and was not any too good in catching up

on the years of missed schooling. Often, when in a mood of discouragement, I wished that there were a Russian girl around on those sturdy and beautiful hills to whom I might go for comfort. Only a Russian girl would understand the conflict between desire and ineptitude, and while she might be as much at a loss to furnish guidance as Paulette or any other girl, if only because my mentality had not yet broken out of the mold of literal-mindedness in which it had been reared, she would neither laugh nor mock, but would seek with the warmth of her hands and her heart to soothe the ache and the frustration.

Shortly afterwards I was sent to the Candys' to bring home a heifer calf. Deliberately I drove in the afternoon so as to be sure that Dot would be home when I arrived. Beside myself with joy at the prospect of seeing her, perhaps alone, I thought of some of the things of which I would speak to her. I might talk to her of Hardy. I might even offer to let her read *Jude* or *Tess*. She would. From her vocabulary alone it was evident that she liked reading books. Then I would talk to her about the State College of Agriculture at Cornell. Perhaps she too was planning to go to college. She might even go to Cornell. An intellectual girl, with her father settled on a large farm and with a select dairy of Holsteins in his barn, some of them thoroughbreds—I learned these details at the milk station —there was no reason why she shouldn't go to college, and if she went to Cornell and we were there at the same time, anything might happen, and it would be pleasant to come home with her for vacations!

As I drove into the yard, the door opened and out came Dot! She wore a red sweater coat, her brother's obviously, and she quickly came over and greeted me. The sheer effusiveness of her manner paralyzed me, and all I could say was:

"I've come to get the heifer calf we bought."

"Oh," she said, with a note of disappointment, "I'll go in and tell Father you're here."

She did not come out again.

One afternoon I found myself escorting Dot to a meeting in the village. We talked of revivals, and I thought that the story of my trip with Bill Young to a revival in Caldversville would amuse her.

I spoke of the sermon, of the call for converts, of Nannie's show of emotional hysteria when Bill and I refused to march forward and swell the record of the evangelist's triumphs. Then I told her what Bill had said about sunsets and lilies, and "I thought," I went on, "that the man was an atheist, and I asked him point-blank if he was."

"What did he say?" Dot eagerly interrupted.

"'I hain't no such damned fool,'" I answered, quoting Bill word for word.

A shadow flitted over Dot's face, and I could sense rebuke in her voice when she said:

"You mustn't use such words."

Covered with confusion, I could hardly stammer out my regrets.

When I got home that evening I resolved that I should never again attempt to see Dot or any other girl alone. After all, I was preparing for college, and books were more important than girls, and Jude *did obscure himself into catastrophe* because he had allowed himself to become seriously involved with Arabella and Sue. I should avoid his pitfalls, any pitfalls.

Good-by, Dot!

I felt calm but not happy.

The next morning I laughed at myself for making such a decision. Of course I should see Dot.

Quite unexpectedly, some months later I was staying overnight at her home. The family sat up late, and we ate apples and popcorn and talked of a multitude of subjects, and never had I found myself more ready of speech than now with the numerous Candy family gathered in the parlor. When bedtime came, Eden, Dot's younger brother, invited me to sleep with him. He shared his bed with me, and when we were under the blanket he said:

"Why don't you hitch up with a girl?" He had already paired off with the postmaster's daughter.

"I suppose I don't know how."

"Ah, it's silly of you to talk like that."

"Besides, there's only one girl I really like."

"I'll bet I know who it is."

"Who?"

"Dot."

I gasped at his powers of divination.

"How d'you know?"

"Flo told me." Flo was the postmaster's daughter.

"I've never said anything to her about it."

"It's true, isn't it?"

I hesitated to make an answer.

"Of course it is," Eden went on exuberantly, "and Dot likes you, too."

"How'd you know?"

"Flo told me."

"Flo tell you everything?"

"Dot told Flo she likes you better than any other boy, but she thinks you're indifferent to her."

Eden readily went to sleep, and I lay awake a long time. I marveled at Eden and envied his decisive way of living. He liked Flo the first time he had met her, and had been seeing only her ever since. So steadfastly had he been "rushing" her that none of her former admirers any longer enjoyed the privilege of walking to or from church with her or taking her to a social, a meeting or any other event. But then Eden had his life mapped out as clearly as the highway engineers had the new road that they were going to build to Mount Brookville. He liked farming and would remain on the land. Never would he go to the city and swelter in a factory. Soon enough he would have a farm of his own and would marry Flo; he had no doubt of that, though by his own admission he hadn't yet asked her. He would move to his own farm and start the cycle all over again—a new Candy family, with himself and his wife, full-fledged members of the Baptist church, sitting, during the Sunday-school lessons, no longer in the rostrum but in the pews, and with fresh candidates someday in the future to fill the vacancies that his and Flo's defection might leave in Elder Jepson's class of True Blues. Spring does come once a year, and the earth does bloom in spring.

Of course I too should someday have a farm of my own. I had no doubt of it at the time, and Dot might fit superbly into my scheme of things and I into hers. But there were years of study and struggle ahead and "someday" was a word that inspired

cheer and yet no little uncertainty. Still should I talk to Dot, perhaps in the morning after breakfast, or should I wait until after dinner, or perhaps until after dark, when I could ask her to go for a walk with me and then—— Then what? If I had Eden's gift for banter I might play with the subject that was on my mind, like a kitten with a string, tug and snap and twirl it, without making or seeking an outright commitment. But I hadn't Eden's gift, nor had I made any appreciable progress in cultivating it. Nothing I had encountered in Mount Brookville, neither land nor folkways, defied my efforts so strenuously as "the hang of things" in conversation with girls when I was alone with them. Perhaps, then, I should content myself with merely stealing or exchanging glances with Dot and thrilling to her shapely mouth and every toss of her lovely head and every move of her quick and graceful body. Perhaps, though, there was more of the taint of Jude in me than I had imagined.

## CHAPTER XX

## *Heinrich*

On a muggy afternoon as I was cleaning the barnyard, a buggy drawn by a white horse stopped at the gateway, and a man inside waved his hand and motioned for me to come over. Because of his gray felt hat and Sunday suit, with collar and tie and patent-leather shoes, I didn't recognize Heinrich Friedhof, the German farmer who lived about a half a mile away from Jim's. I had often met him on the road or when I drove by his farm, and though always friendly and unassuming, he was not given to much "visitin'." Jim had spoken of him as of one of the best citizens in the county. From an immigrant boy working out for others, he rose to the possession of Bill Tawner's homestead, a hilly farm, but so well worked that it had made its original owner affluent. Jim especially admired Heinrich's "civilized habits." The man didn't drink, didn't smoke, didn't chew, saved his pennies, never "chased after women," never abused anybody, neither man nor cow nor horse nor even a piece of land. Besides, he was always accom-

modating and, unlike Alonzo Evans, never refused to lend a tool to a neighbor and gladly exchanged work with others during thrashing and silo-filling time.

Heinrich spoke with a thick German accent and often interspersed his speech with German words.

"How are you?" he said, with an expansiveness that was out of keeping with his usual reserve.

"Workin'," I answered.

Then abruptly:

"How much 's Jim payin' you a mont'?"

"Seventeen and a half dollars."

"Dot's not goot enough for a man like you."

"That's all Jim says he can afford to pay."

Heinrich gave a laugh.

"He could all right eef he vould sell his hops like de rest of us."

"I like to work for Jim."

"Of course you do. Dere ain't no nicer man round here, but it don't do you no goot if he don't sell his hops. D'you plan to stay mit him all summer?"

"I guess so."

"How vould you like to vork for me for tventy-five dollars a mont'?"

I was flattered by Heinrich's offer, not only because of the higher wage he was willing to pay but because of the implied tribute to me as farmhand. Still my first impulse was to say no, but instead I asked what had become of Carl, his hired man. The question stirred Heinrich's ire. Loudly he said:

"He's quit. I made him quit, de gottam fool."

"Why, wasn't he a good worker?"

"Dot ain't it; I ain't never find fault mit his vork. But he started monkey business mit Kate, de old voman's girl, and he ain't never had sense enough to keep his mout' shut, der idiot."

"As bad as that?"

"Vot d'you suppose he done? He paid Kate tventy-five cents a veek for riding mit him to school every Vednesday ven he was carryin' de milk, so he could kiss her. And den ven Kate got sick of him and tol' him she don't vant him to kiss her no more, he got mad and shpilled it all to de ol' voman, an' she got so mad she

vanted to pack an' quit, an' so I had to let him go, de gottam fool."

"Where has he gone?"

"I never asked, and I don' give a damn no more. I like de ol' lady. She's the best housekeeper I ever had, except ven she runs out of laudanum, an' I see dot she don't. I just been to her doctor and got a bottle, but Carl he got no more sense den a calf. Monkey business like dot mit a girl fourteen goin' on fifteen!"

Again he asked me if I'd come and work for him for twenty-five dollars a month. "Unt der 's somethin' else I vant to tell you: I'll pay you reg'lar on de first of every mont'; dat's de vay I like to pay hired men."

"I'll think it over, Heinrich, and let you know soon."

For several days I was in the throes of a painful conflict. I loathed the thought of leaving Jim. I had grown accustomed to him, to Emilia, the house, the bees, the horses, the cows, to everything on the farm that had become a home to me. Jim owed me money, but I was indebted to him for the sturdy education he had given me. It was he who had taught me most of what I had learned about "the hang of things" on an American farm, and his discourses on bees, people, politics, life were always a source of enlightenment and diversion. He had uncovered to me the rough grandeur and the mighty lightheartedness of America, also its superb fearlessness of man, God and government. Years, indeed a lifetime, of sojourn in New York and a whole library of books could never have so amply disclosed to me the outward and inward realities of America, its true heart and mind, as he had by his words and deeds. Heinrich never could be as exciting in conversation, nor did any farmer I knew equal him in the rich saltiness of his language and the boisterous clarity of his thoughts.

Yet I couldn't neglect other considerations. Not only was Heinrich offering me a half more in wages, but he was promising to pay me regularly on the first of the month, and Heinrich's word was law unto himself and unto others. Jim still owed me most of what I had earned for the year that I had worked for him. He hadn't yet sold his hops, and his milk checks barely sufficed for interest on the mortgage, the feed bill and the grocery account. Of course he could have sold the timber in the swamp, but his rebellion

against any effort to inveigle him into such a transaction was to me a heroic outcry of one who loved nature against its despoliation by the brutal hand of man. I would rather have lost every dollar he owed me than see a gang of lumberjacks, armed with saws and double-edged axes, descend on the mighty pines and cedars and fell them to the ground. True enough, he had been promising to pay all he owed me in the coming autumn. But suppose hail came and blasted his hops or, true to his innate rebellion against the rascality of city traders, he again held the bales stacked up in the hophouse in the expectation of winning his lone strike for higher prices? And I had to get money sometime to put it in the bank so that I could have it when I was ready for college. I thought and thought and struggled and struggled and finally decided against sentiment and in favor of advantage.

Of course I shouldn't leave abruptly. Nor would Jim be helpless without me. Yan, the new Polish hired man, would make an excellent worker as soon as he had learned "the hang of things" on an American farm. Because I spoke Yan's language, I had already broken him with ease into chores, handling a team, and the use of implements that were new to him. Only I should need to make sure that, like so many Polish youths fresh from the old country, Yan wouldn't be overcome with loneliness and flee from the farm to the mines in Pennsylvania or to some textile factory so that he could be living among his own people.

I spoke to Yan, and he assured me that he would stay out the summer. The next Sunday I walked over to Heinrich's and told him that I would come and work for him, but only after I had helped to get Jim's hopyards grubbed and plowed and his corn and oat fields plowed and harrowed Heinrich agreed to wait.

That evening at supper, as we were having dessert, I told Jim that I had decided to leave him and work for Heinrich. Without stopping to drink his cup of strong tea, he mumbled:

"Is that so?"

But Emilia gave me a look of reproach.

"I thought," she said, "you was goin' to stay all summer?"

"I'm getting a lot more money from Heinrich, and he's agreed to pay me on the first of every month, and I do want to go to college."

"It's all your fault," said Emilia, turning to Jim. "If you'd done what other folks 's doin' and sold your hops when you could get somethin' for them, you could've paid your hired men on time and kept them when they was any good." She arose and left the table.

"I'm not leaving right away," I said. "I'll stay until Yan is broken into the work and the hops and corn and oat fields are taken care of."

Jim asked for another cup of tea and, without saying a word or looking at me, proceeded to drink it. When he finished, he said:

"Heinrich's a good farmer. You ain't goin' to learn no bad farmin' from him."

Rising from the table, he stepped over to the rocker, planted himself in it, put on his glasses and proceeded to read the freshly arrived copy of Bryan's *Commoner*. I wished he were not so silent. It would have been easier to hear a scolding than to speculate on his inner thoughts and feelings. But he never uttered a word. I felt so uncomfortable that, on arising from the table, I asked Yan to go with me for a walk.

A week later I moved to Heinrich's.

Heinrich had five brothers and one sister. The sister was married and lived in the city. One of the brothers had likewise gone to the city and become a carpenter. The others remained in Mount Brookville. The oldest, Fred, like Heinrich, had a farm of his own, which lay beyond the woods that topped Heinrich's steep and hilly pasture. The old mother lived with Fred but often came to Heinrich's and stayed for several days.

Born in Bavaria in a village, on their arrival in this country the Friedhofs had settled in Mount Brookville. Their sons were all of working age, and because of their industriousness and sobriety the best farmers were always ready to hire them for the highest wages. It was no small compliment to a hired man to hear himself compared to any of the Friedhof brothers. Their very name had become a synonym for the highest grade of farmhand. Superb workers, they were also excellent managers. A man could go off for a long trip and leave his farm in complete charge of any of the Friedhofs and be assured of the best possible tillage of his lands,

the best possible care of his livestock, and as honest and scrupulous regard for every penny he took in and spent as if he himself had handled every transaction. Because they were so completely trusted and received the highest wages in the country, three of the brothers preferred to remain hired hands and managers instead of having their own farms, though the youngest brother, Willie, at the time that I began working for Heinrich, was negotiating for the purchase of a place of his own. The other two kept their money in the bank or loaned it out on well-secured mortgages. Except Heinz, who went to work in the city, none of the Friedhofs ever married, and so close were they drawn toward one another that they would never enter a business transaction without talking it over with the others, especially with Fritz, who was next to Heinrich in age, and who was supposed to be uncommonly "smart" in business matters. Only one of them, Willie, could read and write. The others, including Fritz, were completely illiterate.

Life was strenuous but cheerful on the new place. Heinrich always worked beside me and, no matter how serious the mistake I made, unlike Jim he never showed anger, never scolded, never even spoke a loud word. What Jim had said of him—that he wouldn't teach me "no bad farmin' "—was perfectly true. He loved a cleanly hoed cornfield as much as did Jim, perhaps more. He couldn't bear the sight of weeds. If he saw a thistle or a milkweed in a far-away row of corn or potatoes, he would go over and pull it up with his hands. The same was true of his barns. The walls of the cow stables always sparkled with whitewash, and he never considered a stable cleaned until it was not only scraped but swept as clean as a house. If the spots on a horse's hide were so deep that neither currycomb nor brush could erase them, he would use a rag and soap and water to wash them off. If I neglected to do so, he would do it himself and never say a word to me. It seemed as though his very happiness depended on the meticulous performance of every task on the farm.

Heinrich loved food no less fervently than work, especially breakfast. Nell Lonebeck, his housekeeper, had learned from his mother how to make German pancakes, and every morning we had them for breakfast. Kent would have gloried in the breakfasts Nell

served. Oatmeal and cream, eggs and ham or bacon, griddle cakes, mountains of them with butter and maple syrup or honey, and all the fried cakes, molasses or sugar cookies anyone cared to eat. An enormous eater, Heinrich never failed to partake of everything on the table. He ate stack after stack of cakes, hot off the griddle, and he never considered his breakfast complete without at least three cups of coffee, as many fried cakes, topped off by a cooky or two. That was why, often enough, when he arose from the table he would say to me:

"Oh, Maurice, I guess you better go to der milk station dis mornin'. I got such a terrible gutsache."

Yet the next morning his appetite was no less ravenous nor was he more eager to curb its demands. But gutsache or no gutsache, Heinrich never stayed in the house to complain and pity himself. There was always work in the field and in the barns, and he never missed doing his full share.

What especially excited me on Heinrich's farm was his dog—a half-breed female Scotch collie with a clover-shaped white spot on her face and a sheaf of white on the belly running down the feet. She was cross-eyed, the only cross-eyed dog I had ever seen. Her name, Rover, was unworthy of so wise, distinguished and friendly an animal. Jim also had a dog, a black male collie, but he was big and sullen and lazy. Now and then he would come down to the barn, sniff around and trot away. Now and then he would run off to the swamp and be gone several days. He didn't like cows and wouldn't follow anyone to the pasture and help bring them home. He never had killed a woodchuck in his life, which was one of the more serious grievances that Jim held against him. Most of the time he lay on the porch, with his muzzle in his paws, and waited for his meals of potato and milk gravy. He didn't especially like being patted. Though he never objected to being caressed, he never teased for it and never showed any appreciation when it was offered him. Self-satisfied and taciturn, he was just another mouth to feed on the farm, yet Jim would neither drive him away nor allow anyone to shoot him.

Rover was quite the opposite—she glowed with animation and friendliness. The moment I drove into Heinrich's yard she hopped all over me and licked my hands and face as if to reassure me of

her affection. With undisguised enthusiasm she followed me to the cow stable, the barns and everywhere else I went. She brimmed over with affection for everyone in the house—for Nell, Kate, Heinrich and even for the numerous cats that Nell kept. She was death on woodchucks. There was no need for Heinrich to set traps for them in his clover field. Rover could be depended on to clean them out and either bring them home dead or bury them somewhere in the woods. Often she lay around a hole for a long time waiting for the woodchuck to come out. When he did, she sprang on him, and after a strenuous battle it was good-by woodchuck. Whenever she killed one, she would come around and look up, panting as though expecting appreciation, which neither Heinrich nor I failed to lavish on her. I never knew her to do the wrong thing—chase hens, bark at a horse, or touch food that might be accessible, unless it was given to her, or follow a team off the farm.

Her chief asset was her almost human way with cows. Heinrich's pasture was a steep hill that descended to a creek and then rose even more steeply to a crest that was dark with ash and maple, balsam and hemlock. On hot days, to escape sun and flies the cows wandered off into the woods, and if Heinrich or I had had to go after them at milking time, we would have wasted much time on the errand. With Rover to help us, all we needed to do was to go to the gateway and say, "Go on, Rover, bring them home, quick, that's the girl." Yelping with joy, she would gallop away and never stop or look back until she sighted the cows. Then she would bark fiercely. The cows had already learned the meaning of this bark and would start down the hill. Rover would bring them all together and follow them behind in silence, unless one of them was seized by an uncontrollable impulse to stray off for another mouthful of grass. Then she would dart after her and just bark—never bite and never chase—just bark. If the cow joined the herd, Rover resumed her place in the rear, and if she persisted in having her own way, Rover would prance around her and bark so threateningly that she would forget she ever had an unruly impulse and run back where she was wanted and meekly follow the path home. Rover always stopped some distance away when the herd was at the gateway and wouldn't come near until after we had counted the cows and called her. If a cow was missing, she was ready on order to run back all

the way to the top of the hill and through the woods and bark vociferously until the recalcitrant one came out of hiding and started on the trail home. Again as long as the cow followed the trail, Rover trotted silently behind, never uttering a bark or a whine. But if she strayed off the trail or as much as put her mouth to the grass, Rover instantly reminded her that feeding was over for the time being. The only occasion when Rover reneged on her duty was when she ran into a woodchuck. No amount of shouting or commanding would stir her into abandoning the battle. Not that Heinrich or I ever sought too hard to take her attention off the brown-furred creature of the rattling teeth. But even then we didn't need to go up the hill after the cows. Rover's barking was so imperative and so earnest that they started for home anyway!

Not until Rover was in heat and we put her away in the haymow over the horses and kept the hatchway shut so that she could not come out, did we realize what a chore it was and the amount of time it took to bring the cows home. Usually Heinrich sent me after them. The cows had become so accustomed to Rover's bark that they paid little heed to my incessant shouting of "Come, boss." If they were deep in the woods, they were in no hurry to come out, and I had to go up all the way to bring them home. Meanwhile, dogs from all over the countryside, including Jim's lazy collie, kept running up and down our barnyard, barking continually, and it was dangerous to allow Rover to come out even for only a long enough time to bring the cows home. Heinrich and I breathed in relief when her mating period was over.

Nature struck a heavy blow at Heinrich. In the midst of the haying, his housekeeper died. She passed away during her sleep in the night. After the burial, Kate, who was Nell's adopted daughter, went to live with her mother in a town a long distance away, and in the midst of the haying we remained without a woman in the house. Heinrich muttered and groaned and searched the country for someone to keep house for him, but no one was available. Several promised to come, but only after the haying. Meanwhile we had to do our own cooking.

"I'll tell you vot," said Heinrich, "you do der cookin' until I find a voman and ve'll get along."

By this time I had become completely used to American food—that is, to eating it. Now I had to learn to cook it. Nor was I given a choice in the matter, because we had to eat, and Heinrich loathed to get near a stove. His mother came over and helped us for a few days and taught me how to bake griddle cakes and to fry ham and eggs. I went to Emilia and learned from her how to bake johnnycake and cook corn mush. From the wife of a neighbor I learned how to bake beans, and that was a boon, for I could bake enough in one crock to last us several days. Then I bought a cookbook and became ambitious to try my hand at baking pie. Our pasture was loaded with berries, and Heinrich and I got tired of eating them with cream. We both longed for homemade pie. Studiously following the directions of the cookbook, I made the crust for three pies, loaded them with berries, and after setting them inside a well-heated oven I went off to the barn to help Heinrich with the milking. With pride I told him that I had three pies baking, and instantly he showed his desire to eat a whole pie and milk for supper—that is, if the pies were any good. I too was hoping to have for supper a whole pie and milk. When it was time to take the pies out of the oven, I ran to the house, swung open the oven door—and the sight inside darkened my eyes. The pans were there, precisely where I had placed them, and so were the crusts, inside the pans, but not the berries. They had hopped out from inside the crusts and lay in shiny sizzling rings around the pans. I wondered what it was that had pushed the berries out of the crusts. Distressed and baffled, I went to ask our neighbor's wife for an explanation of the catastrophe. "Did you paste the crusts together with water or the white of an egg?"

"No," I almost shouted, so choked was I with anger at myself for having neglected this detail in the directions of the cookbook.

Shortcake was much easier to make, and often I baked two huge biscuits, soaked them deep in mashed and sugared berries, and Heinrich and I each ate a whole shortcake for supper.

I didn't mind the cooking, but the dishwashing always dismayed me, and at first I sought to pass the job to Heinrich. But he was no more enamored of it than I, and after protracted deliberation he said:

"I tell you vot ve do. Ve got lots of dishes dot ve use hop-pickin'

time, so ve just dump dem in der vashtub after every meal, and Sundays ve vash dem all togeder for de whole week." Heartily I assented to the proposal.

Yet when Sunday came around we were more loath than ever to wash the dishes, because there were so many of them, and only after much groaning and muttering did we heat the boiler and compel ourselves to go through with the onerous task.

One afternoon, on my return from the field, I found two visitors in the house, a man and a woman. The woman was of medium height, with a broad bony face, uneasy gray eyes, graying dark hair and a nervous manner. The man was tall, handsome, with thick dark hair cut in a pompadour and a thick bristly mustache that accentuated the sensuous fullness of his lips. Heinrich introduced them as Miss and Mr Kubelman, brother and sister, from the city where his sister was living and where he had once worked as a teamster. Though they arrived unexpectedly, Heinrich seemed glad to welcome them—glad, but not enthusiastic. He had known them in the city. During his stay there he had visited their home more often than that of any other German family. During supper he remarked jestingly that if the girl wished to remain on the farm he would engage her as his housekeeper. He laughed uproariously, to indicate that he was jesting, but neither the girl nor her brother joined in the laugh.

Late that evening I was already asleep when I felt someone shaking me by the shoulder. It was Heinrich. He had come in with a lamp and was sitting on my bed. Startled at this unwonted visit, I said:

"What's the matter?"

"The girl's cryin'—d'you hear her?"

He strained his ears and I strained mine, and from the outside came a subdued convulsive sob.

"What's happened?"

"*Gott im Himmel*—de nerve of de girl—de nerve of de whole damn Kubelman family!"

"Why, what's she been trying to do?"

"She came to ask me to marry her—can you beat dot? If I vanted to marry her, I could 'ave sent for her, couldn't I?"

He stopped and listened again, and the sobbing was still audible.

"It's her moder and fader. Dey put her up to it. She's an old maid, and dey're ashamed of her and tried to make me marry her ven I vas in der city, but I told dem I didn't vant to marry nobody. Now she heard from my broder dot my housekeeper died, and she come over to ask me again to marry her because I needed somebody to keep house for me. Can you beat dot? *Ach, Gott! Die verfluchte Leute!*"

"What are you going to do?"

"Vot can I do? I told her to go back home, and she started crying. But I don't want to marry no old maid like her. I don't vant to marry nobody. My broders here ain't never got married; vhy should I? De nerve of de girl. *Gott im Himmel!*"

The next morning the visitors left, and several days later Heinrich received a letter from a lawyer in the city in which the Kubelmans lived, requesting him to call at his office at the earliest possible time on a matter of urgent importance. Since he was illiterate, I read the letter to him and, thinking that it was a scheme to inveigle him into a shady transaction, he tore it up and threw it to the wind.

A few days afterwards he received another letter from the same lawyer to the same effect and couched in more vigorous language. This time Heinrich thought he had better drive over to see his brother Fritz. Fritz advised him to go to a near-by village and see the German lawyer living there. Heinrich acted accordingly, and the German lawyer learned that Miss Kubelman was suing for breach of promise. At first Heinrich laughed. Then he stopped and thought. Then he fumed. Then he hitched up the buggy and drove again to see his brother Fritz. Then all the brothers came over and had a conference. They agreed that Heinrich must fight the case. The German lawyer had said that if he would marry the girl she would drop the suit. But how could he marry a girl whom he didn't want to marry, especially when she was seeking to force the marriage?

Thereafter the subject was so much on Heinrich's mind that he could talk of nothing else.

"Imagine it—vantin' me to marry her ven I told her fader and her moder and her dot I didn't vant to marry nobody, and now

gettin' a lawyer and fixin' up deenks so dey can scare me into it. I'll show dem. You vait and see. I'll show dem. I hain't no vorse dan a voodchuck. Ven Rover catches one avay from der hole, he stands up on his hind legs and fights, and he fights like hell mit his teet' and his whole body, and he don't give up fightin' until he's goot and dead, and I tell you I vouldn't give up fightin' until I am goot and dead. Vait and see. *Die verfluchte Leute!*"

Heinrich dressed up in his Sunday suit and collar and tie and patent-leather shoes and went with his lawyer to the city to fight the suit. I remained alone on the farm. Now I had to do not only the cooking but all the chores and the field work and everything else. I didn't mind the work, nor did it bother me in the daytime to stay alone on the place. But after dark my heart quaked. I no longer believed in ghosts or in the Evil One, and yet the wood on the top of the hill and the many incessant sounds of night filled me with forebodings. It was not man I feared. There were no robbers or bandits around, and Heinrich, like Jim, like all the farmers in the neighborhood, never had bothered to lock even the grain house. It was the dark of night, the spirit of night, the mystery of night that I dreaded. My sojourn in Mount Brookville had ground out of me many of my Old World beliefs and practices, had indeed given me a wholly new perspective on life, but deep inside of me were still imbedded the old fears of the unknown. I don't know what I should have done had it not been for the dog. I was so closely drawn to Rover that I kept her beside me in my room all night, and so grateful was I to her for this companionship that every evening I baked two shortcakes, one for myself and one for her, and I always soaked hers in milk to make it more palatable for her.

Heinrich was gone a good part of the week. I was in the barn milking cows when he returned. Without bothering to change his clothes, he came in and, shaking both fists in the air, he shouted:

"Maurice, you're a gottam fool."

"Why?"

"Because you go to dem True Blue socials."

"What's wrong with that?"

"I know why you go there—so you can spoon mit dem girls."

I gave a laugh.

"Don't laugh I tell you. Der ain't nodeenk goot about vomens, unt de best deenk an honest man can do is never to have nodeenk to do mit none of dem."

I knew now that Heinrich had lost the case, and I didn't have to wait to hear the details. Though always reserved about his personal affairs, he was now bursting with a passion to unburden himself of everything. Still clenching his fists, and now and then pressing them to his temples, he went on acrimoniously:

"Dey all lied; she lied, her broder lied, her fader lied, her moder lied. Dey all said I promised to marry her, deenk of dot—ven I never said a vord—I swear to Gott, I didn't. It vas she who vas alvays askin' me to marry her, and she got a judgment against me of sixteen hoondred dollars! Deenk of it—sixteen hoondred dollars! *Mein Gott,* five years' vork, yes, Maurice, five years' vork just t'rown avay like it vas sawdust . . . *Ach, mein Gott,* vat liars, vat pigs people can be!"

So choked was he with grief and anger that he started walking up and down the barn, clenching and unclenching his hands, and clutching with both at his hair and muttering in a half-sob, *"Mein Gott, ach mein Gott, die verfluchte Leute, solche verfluchte Leute.* Five years' vork—five years' sveatin' and grubbin' for nodeenk. Who'd ever 'ave tought it, *ach mein Gott!"*

He was pathetic beyond words, this stalwart, self-confident, self-made German farmer to whom sixteen hundred dollars was, as he had so poignantly expressed himself, five years of sweating and grubbing. I had no reason to disbelieve his contention that he had never proposed to the girl. Yet here he was with a judgment against him, and the fruits of five years of his life were to be hacked out of him as with an axe. More than ever was I glad that I had run away from the city. Here in Mount Brookville no girl, young or old, would ever have sued a man for breach of promise even if the man had proposed to her. Here people were not only serene and friendly but magnificently honest, and in my youthful naïveté I conceived of the city as a monster that was poisoning the minds and the hearts of people.

"You had no business going to the city to work," I said dourly.

"Of course not, but how vas I to know dey vould be such

bastards? *Mein Gott*—dey vas all so friendly ven I come to dere house—gif me coffee and cake—unt talked to me about de old country and everydeenk. Five years for nodeenk. *Ach mein lieber Gott!*"

## CHAPTER XXI

### *Abner*

Even were it not for the cane with which he groped his way along, Abner's gait was unmistakable. His limping left foot, his short measured tread, his bowed head always betrayed him. Because of the way he manipulated his cane, anyone who didn't know him might imagine that he was partially or totally blind. Yet the eyes were the only part of him of which he never complained. Abner (no one ever called him Mr Tawner) used a cane because he was afraid of woodchuck holes, and well he might be. His lands were so badly neglected that woodchucks had taken possession of them, and several times he had stuck his left foot into their holes and aggravated an unhealed wound. So much of an obsession had woodchuck holes become to him that he groped for them when he walked the grassy edge of the main highway as well as when he crossed one of his own fields.

Abner's best friend was Jim, and Jim's best friend was Abner. They had grown up together as boys, had dealt in hops together as men, and sworn with equal ardor by William Jennings Bryan and the Democratic party. They were the only Democrats in the whole valley, and they lived only a short distance apart.

One of Abner's chief occupations every day was to visit Jim, but, unlike Art Kendal, he timed his calls so as to come after and not before a meal, not even at the end of it, when Emilia might be serving dessert. Often he forgot himself and overstayed until Emilia began setting the table. Yet the moment she or Jim said a word about his remaining for dinner or supper, he would pick up his cane and start groping and limping his way home. His excuse for refusing the invitation was always the same—illness and lack of appetite. When I first knew him I marveled how he could remain

as fleshy as he was and yet go without food as much as he wailed he had.

Yet whenever Abner started talking of his ailments it was hard not to believe him and harder still not to feel sorry for him. His heart was bad, his liver was troubling him, his lungs were giving out, the flesh melted off his bones the moment he stepped out into the sun, and his stomach was in perpetual disorder. Even his teeth were bad, and the few that remained in his mouth were giving him no end of pain and trouble.

Often, instead of taking the highway, Abner used to walk to Jim's place cross-lots, and if he passed a field where I was working he would stop to talk to me of his ailments, of his envy of my youth and strength, and of the time when he was as strong as a bull and could lift a two-hundred-pound sack of feed as easily as a cane. Now and then he would start on the cause of his misfortunes, or rather on their injustice. Why should afflictions crowd on him like crows on a shock of ripened corn? He had done people no harm—not knowingly. He had always been a hard-working man—that is, in the years when he had his strength. He still managed to do a considerable amount of work. He had never been much on drink. True he chewed, but so did Jim, and yet, with the exception of an occasional headache and an attack of sciatica, Jim was a well man. At least he could eat enough to keep himself well, and he never missed a meal, for even when he was sick and laid up in bed he had to have his pie and coffee. But he wasn't Jim. He was Abner, and all the ailments of mankind never ceased to tumble on his aged body. If he could get back his appetite and eat, he would have hope of regaining his health. But his appetite was no better than a rotted apple tree—nothing seemed to have power to restore it to a normal condition. He had taken more medicines than doctors knew anything about—pills, drops, powders—and they had done him no good, not a bit of it. His appetite remained bad, and without his appetite he could not eat the food that he needed to regain his strength and be himself again.

Abner was only slightly younger than Jim; yet, despite all his complaints, he didn't show his age like Jim. He boasted a mop of hair which had not lost all of its original blackness. His shoulders

were less bent than Jim's, and his face was less wrinkled. Taller than Jim and formidably bulky, his rolling abdomen seemed in perpetual rebellion against concealment by his shirt, the ends of which always managed to slip out and expose folds of flesh. Abner chewed tobacco as assiduously as Jim but, unlike Jim, who chewed slowly, with only the jaws in motion, Abner made the indulgence a task for the whole face—which might explain the cause of his perpetual scowl. When he laughed, the scowl didn't disappear, was scarcely disturbed.

It was Jim who had first warned me not to feel sorry for Abner's lack of appetite, for there was not a "damned word of truth in it." The chief trouble with Abner, Jim insisted, was too much appetite. That was why he was so fat and sick and unable to work. Yet Abner only needed to start enumerating his ailments and to mourn their dread effect on his capacity for food, and I would forget Jim's warnings or, if I remembered, I was disinclined to believe them. I felt that no man could so eloquently falsify the real condition of his health. Besides, I had never seen Abner eat. I had never been in his home when he was having a meal, and he never stayed for one at Jim's.

Shortly I was to discover that Jim had not exaggerated when he charged that the trouble with Abner was, not lack of appetite, but too much of it. Abner had asked Jim to lend me to him for a few days to cut cedar hop poles in his woods. He was in desperate need of money, and a farmer was willing to pay ten cents a pole and take two hundred of them, if Abner could deliver them at once. Jim agreed to release me for a few days. On my second day with Abner, I had breakfast with him. Since he had no housekeeper any more, he did his own work, including the cooking. Addicted, like so many farmers in Mount Brookville, to griddle cakes, he could stir the batter and ladle it out on the griddle and flap over the cakes as well as any woman. After loading my plate with several stacks of them he loaded his own plate with as many stacks. When I finished mine I could eat no more. But not Abner. Again and again he rose, made trips to the kitchen and came back with fresh batches of steaming cakes and ate them with undiminished and unabashed zest. I could hardly believe my eyes. I

gaped at the man as at a creature I never had seen and had only heard of. Forgetting discretion, I reminded him that he wasn't supposed to have an appetite. After bolting a huge mouthful of cakes, he countered by assuring me that it had only started to come back, and that since he was sure it wouldn't last long, as nothing good that had come to him ever did, he was only making the most of the opportunity and storing up energy for the lean times ahead. He was no worse than a woodchuck, and a woodchuck always stored up enough fat under his hide to last him through the months he didn't eat. Why, then, shouldn't he do likewise?

Now I knew why he had consistently refused to eat at Jim's. Once he betrayed his inordinate capacity for food he could not with a clear conscience indulge in the favorite pastime of lamenting his illnesses and his lack of appetite.

Though as stalwart a Democrat as Jim, Abner never had laid his troubles to the evil machinations of the Republicans. He was too overcome with the sadness of his plight to charge them to the villainy of anyone in particular. Neighbors, however, held that they had sprung from his own family. His wife had left him and gone to live elsewhere, and his children, they said, chiefly his sons, who had worked on the farm, had collected all the checks but had neglected to pay the bills. Driven into ever-deepening debt, Abner had mortgaged his dairy, and when, after repeated efforts to collect payments, the holder had obtained only endless promises, he had "brought the law" on Abner and sold his dairy, with every cow in the barn. Abner had been prostrate with misery, but had never solicited help from friends, not even from Jim. He had lain around the house and waited for a miracle to happen. Nor had he been disappointed. As if in answer to the protest of his own heart for leaving Abner in destitution, the man who had "brought the law" on him had started a subscription among farmers to raise fifty dollars so as to enable Abner to buy one cow. He himself had headed the list with a contribution of five dollars. Farmers, chiefly Republicans, had eagerly responded to the appeal. Abner had felt grateful for the aid, and with the money that was given him he had bought a cow. In a few years he had three cows.

Neighbors assured me that though the sale of his dairy, his

wife's desertion, his sons' betrayal had left Abner alone and destitute, he was not bereft of hope. He worked, though not much. He hired a man to help him and proceeded to get out of his lands what profit he could, and this time he managed his own affairs, collected his own checks and paid out his money.

Then, like a burst of sunlight after a long siege of darkness, Nell Lonebeck appeared on the scene. A widow in the late forties, Nell like Abner had had an unhappy life and was searching for a place to work where she could make a home for herself and for freckle-faced Kate, her adopted daughter. On first sight Nell seemed too withered for so strenuous a task as housekeeping on a farm. She was slight of build, with a humped back and a pale, bony face. But there was energy in the woman; her large gray eyes gleamed with it, her soft, decisive voice rang with it, her alert, though slender, hands throbbed with it. Her eagerness and trust moved Abner, and he engaged her to keep house for him. Nell was only too happy to accept the offer.

Abner was not only elated with his new housekeeper, he fell in love with her and she with him. Gossip had it that they were living together. Jim would neither confirm nor deny this gossip. Yet even in the eyes of neighbors who believed it, neither Abner nor Nell lost esteem; at least I had never heard anyone utter a derogatory word about either. Protestant and moral as it was, Mount Brookville didn't interfere in the personal lives of men like Abner and women like Nell. I imagine that if it had been the Professor of the school, or any of the teachers, or some other public servant associated with the good name and the moral repute of the community who was suspected of a liaison with a woman that had received neither the sanctification of the Church nor the seal of the law, the community would have voiced its protest in one way or another. But earning his living, not from the performance of a public service, but from the land, Abner, or any man like him, even if deemed guilty of the charge with which gossip had credited him, at worst could safely defy public opinion.

For once in his life Abner was supremely happy, and so was Nell, especially after she had succeeded, at least while in his own home, in curbing his incessant plaints about the collapse of his appetite. She had had ample justification for her action, particularly after her

experience with the head of early cabbage which she had bought from Clem Plummer. When Abner saw it raw on the table he looked at it with displeasure, for he knew that Clem charged fancy prices for early cabbage or anything else that he sold.

"Nell," he said, "early cabbage ain't no good eatin' this time of the year—upsets people's stomachs."

"Very well," answered Nell, "you needn't have any of it."

When Nell set the table she happened to bring first the boiled cabbage. Abner immediately started eating it, and by the time Nell emerged from the kitchen with other dishes, not a leaf of the cabbage had remained on the platter.

"I thought," chided Nell, "you said early cabbage ain't good eatin', upsets people's stomachs?"

"There wasn't much of it, Nell, only a mouthful or two," Abner replied apologetically.

Nell scowled and dropped the subject. Her tolerance of his inconsistencies only deepened his respect and affection for her.

Though for himself he seldom bought anything new, Abner gave Nell all the money he could afford, for dresses and shoes for herself and Kate. Nor did he ever say a word about the bills that she ran up in the store for groceries. More, whenever Nell was out of laudanum he hastened to the doctor to obtain a fresh bottle. Abner knew how helpless she was without the drug. Years before she came to him, she had developed the habit in the course of a serious illness. At first Abner thought he could break her from the habit. He tried hard enough. He argued, scolded, exhorted It hurt him to see the woman he loved so enslaved to the drug. But he soon learned better.

One day Jim came for a visit. Nell was in the kitchen, he and Jim in the living room. Though the two friends were Democrats, in their discussions of politics they often disagreed, and whenever this happened Jim accused Abner of going Republican, whereupon Abner charged that no good Democrat would make such an accusation. Neither man could remain calm in the face of an attack on his whole-souled allegiance to the Democratic party, yet, once made, neither man would retract or desist from his original charge. The ensuing battle might last for hours, with Jim becoming more and more profane in his denunciation of Abner's Repub-

lican deviations and with Abner becoming more and more grieved with Jim's political heresies.

This time no sooner did the battle start when Nell dashed in from the kitchen and shouted: "Shut up, both of you." Her body trembled, her eyes glowed with wrath, and for a brief moment both men were paralyzed into silence. No sooner had she gone back to the kitchen than they again opened fire on each other's political integrity. Of a sudden white with rage, Nell again flew into the living room, brandishing a rolling pin and advancing toward the two shouting men. Both instantly skulked out of the room, Jim by one door, Abner by the other. Then Nell collapsed and cried that if she didn't get laudanum she would die. Frightened, Abner hitched up his horse and drove to the doctor and soon came back with a fresh bottle of the drug. Never again did he say a word about breaking Nell of the habit.

Had Abner been in a position to continue supporting Nell even as modestly as he had been, Nell would have been happy to continue living with him. Yet no devotion could make up for the annoyances and the hardships that dwindling income imposed on her. Kate needed a new pair of shoes, and Abner couldn't buy them. The storekeeper in Mount Brookville had warned him that unless he paid his bills his credit for groceries would be shut off. Abner was worried. Nell was in despair, and Kate cried for a new pair of shoes. Finally, when they learned that Heinrich Friedhof was in need of a housekeeper, they agreed that she should go and work for the German. Heinrich was only too happy to engage Nell, and Abner was pleased that she would live near enough so that he could visit her every day. Nor did Heinrich object when Nell continued to bake bread for Abner and pie and molasses cookies or go to his house now and then and do his washing and clean up the kitchen and the living room.

"Remember one thing, Heinrich," Abner whispered on the first day Nell was in Heinrich's house, "don't never let her get out of laudanum. No tellin' what might happen if you do."

"I won't," Heinrich assured Abner, and he always kept his word.

By the time I went to work for Heinrich, Nell and Kate had

already been there for months and had installed themselves in the house as though it had always been their home.

Nell was a superb housekeeper, as friendly as Emilia, and evenings when work was over I often sat out on the porch and talked to her. She told me many things about herself and about Abner which I had not known, and she never failed to praise Heinrich for allowing her to do "little things for poor old Abner." If a day passed and Abner didn't show up, which happened rarely, she would send Kate or me down to see if anything had happened to him, and the next time he came she chided him bitterly for neglecting her.

One evening, as Heinrich and I came in for supper, Nell couldn't sit through the meal. She had had her laudanum, so it couldn't be failure to partake of the drug that had given her a "splittin' headache." Heinrich offered to send for the doctor, but she wouldn't hear of it. She was certain that the headache would pass and that in the morning she would be well again. The next morning Abner came. She felt well enough to go into the kitchen and do her work. Abner stayed until dinnertime and then went home, with a fresh loaf of bread and a fresh pie under his arm. No sooner was he gone than Nell started complaining again of a "splittin' headache." She didn't get up for supper, nor did she touch a mouthful of the food that Kate had offered her. Instead she took an extra dose of laudanum, which only made her more ill.

Heinrich and I went to her bedroom and talked to her. She felt broken up because she couldn't help Kate get our supper. We assured her that we had had a good meal, and she felt better, though she continued to apologize effusively for neglecting us. She wouldn't do it again, she promised, and in the morning she would make it up to us in the nice breakfast she would cook. She was certain that she would be well in the morning, for there wasn't any excuse or reason in the world for her being sick—not as long as she could have her laudanum. We complimented her on her spirit and with a feeling of reassurance bade her good night and left.

We were in the midst of haying, and after a day's work we felt so fatigued that we could recline on the lawn or on the floor of

the living room and sleep through the night. Especially if there was a breeze outdoors, Heinrich and I would often stretch out on the grass in the yard and doze off for hours or for the whole night right in our clothes. That evening, however, we retired to our rooms, and the moment my head touched the pillow I was lost to the world.

I felt someone shaking my shoulders and opened my eyes. Before me stood Heinrich, lamp in hand, and Kate, both barefooted, bareheaded and in long white nightshirts. Kate looked alarmed, and her eyes were shiny.

"The old lady is dead," Heinrich said, scarcely above a whisper.

The words brushed sleep away from my eyes, and I sat up with a start.

"What?" I exclaimed incredulously.

*"Tot,"* answered Heinrich in German.

"When did she die?"

"It must have been a short time ago, vasn't it, Kate?" He turned to Kate, whose shoulders were hunched as though she were overcome with dread.

"She woke up," said Kate, "and asked for a drink of water. I gave it to her, and she said she was feeling better, so I went to sleep again. Then I suddenly woke, and I spoke to her, but she didn't answer. I spoke to her again, and when she didn't say nothin' I shook her by the shoulder, and then I got frightened and jumped out of bed and ran to tell Heinrich."

"She was dead all right," said Heinrich, "ven I vent to take a look at her."

Dawn was creeping over the wooded pasture, and its coming mitigated the ghostliness of the bareheaded, barefooted white-shirted figures and the dread of death that had come over me.

"Shall I go and tell Abner?" I said.

"Ve better milk der cows first," said Heinrich.

Kate was afraid to stay in the house alone and went to the barn with us and remained until we had finished milking.

As I was starting on foot for Abner's place, Heinrich said:

"Don't say notin' about the ol' lady bein' dead, just say she's very sick."

When I reached Abner's house the door was still bolted. I peered through the window and saw him stretched out on the sofa, with a sheet over his head. I rattled the panes with my fingers, again and again. I never had imagined that a man as full of ailments as he could sleep so soundly. At last he woke and opened the door.

"I came to tell you Nell is very sick," I said.

"Is that so?" Not yet fully awake, Abner was with one hand rubbing his eyes and with the other scratching himself vigorously under the shirt. He had slept in his clothes and in stockinged feet, and after he had fully wakened it didn't take him long to get ready for the walk to Heinrich's.

"D'you think it's serious?" he asked.

"Heinrich said nothing about it being serious."

The road lay mostly uphill, and frequently Abner paused for rest and to wipe the sweat from his brow and to complain of his poor health.

"I hain't even as strong as Jim no more," he wailed, "and I used to be much stronger. He hain't never said nothin' about it while you was workin' for him?"

"Not a word."

For once his fat, flabby face lighted up with satisfaction.

"When we was both young I could lick the stuffin' out of him. Yes, sir, I could, and he won't deny it, neither. Once I got so mad I pushed him into the creek and stepped on his new hat and got it all twisted and soaked in mud. He wouldn't speak to me for a whole week after that. Then we made up, but he hain't never worn that hat again." Abner laughed at the memory of his triumph, and it was good to hear him, for he wasn't given to laughter.

We started up the hill again, and his mirth quickly died down.

"Now I couldn't do it no more," he added plaintively. "I couldn't lick nobody."

He sighed, and though we walked slowly and he took short steps and groped ahead with his cane, his breathing was quick and loud. Always a pathetic figure, he never seemed more so than now as he was on his way to be dealt the cruellest blow that destiny had yet leveled at him.

At last we reached Heinrich's yard. Gasping for breath, Abner stopped in the shade of a tree. He took off his old and rumpled

felt hat, wiped the sweat from his forehead with the sleeve of his shirt and fanned himself with the hat.

"How's Nell?" he shouted to Heinrich, who was sitting beside Kate on the steps of the house.

Instead of answering, Heinrich came down the steps, and Kate followed him.

"She ain't too sick, is she?" drawled Abner.

"She's very sick, Abner, very sick," Heinrich answered.

"Hain't she been up this morning?"

Heinrich glanced at me and at Kate, and then, looking Abner firmly in the eyes, said:

"I may as vell tell you the truth, Abner. Nell ain't never goin' to get up no more."

Abner straightened up, and his jaws stopped rotating.

"Too bad, Abner. Nell ain't never goin' to get up no more. She's dead."

Kate started crying, and Abner carelessly flung the hat on his head and, without a word of comment, started for the house. Heinrich, Kate and I followed along. At the doorway of Nell's bedroom Abner paused and gazed in silence at the bed on which lay the dead body covered with a white sheet. With his mouth open and breathing hard and his eyes opening wider and wider, he continued staring at the body as though it were the most solemn mystery that had ever confronted him. Then he stepped over to the window, raised the blind a little so that more light could enter the room and, stooping over the bed, he uncovered Nell's face. Tense with a feeling of terror at the sight of the dead face, I watched Abner, expecting him any instant to break into talking and crying. But he was as silent as the dead body before him. Not a whimper came out of him. Bending over Nell, he gave her a long kiss on the brow. Then, unmindful of our presence, he moved a chair close to the bed, sat down and continued to gaze at the small head with the tumbling brown hair, the dry, shriveled lips, and the eyes that were partially open, as though peering longingly at him.

Once more Kate started crying. Heinrich drew his arm around her and walked her out of the bedroom. But Abner didn't seem to hear her. Oblivious to the whole world, he never turned, never moved. Again I expected him to say something or start crying, but

not a word, not a sob, not a sigh did he utter. He only stared at the miserable corpse before him.

"Come, Abner," Heinrich spoke from the other room, "and have a cup of coffee."

Abner never answered. Heinrich looked into the bedroom and repeated the invitation. Abner never stirred, never even turned his head. Had it been night instead of day, I might have succumbed to old superstitions and imagined him in a trance or possessed of an evil spirit. All the more inexplicable was his stony reserve, because, of all the men I had known in Mount Brookville, he loved most to speak of his misfortunes. Yet now, in the face of the supreme tragedy in his life, he was as inarticulate as the corpse at which he was fixedly gazing. What were his thoughts and feelings? Or was he so paralyzed with the shock of the affliction that his tongue was frozen and his eyes had become as dry as a stalk of mowed grass in the hot sun? His utter silence made him more terrifying than the dead woman on the bed before him.

Nor did his manner change when the undertaker came, or during the funeral. The most grieved of the mourners, he was the most silent, and when people spoke to him and he made no answer, out of respect or pity, they refrained from further conversation.

"Did you ever see the like of him?" I said to Heinrich. "He won't say a word and won't shed a tear."

"Poor Abner, I feel so sorry for him, he ain't nobody left no more in de vorld."

After the funeral Abner came to the house every day. He would walk into the bedroom, sit in the chair and gaze in silence and as fixedly at the bed in which Nell died as when the body was still before him. Only when Kate left and went to live with her mother in a far-away town did he cease these daily pilgrimages.

For days I kept asking myself what was there in the man, in Mount Brookville, in American civilization that bred such steely self-control? I had never known or heard of anyone in the old village so utterly bereft of articulateness in the face of so supreme an affliction. Not one tear, not one sob, not a sound of a lament; all of it—the grief, the torment, the hopelessness—held securely inside as under a steel lock. It seemed as if the mute and im-

mutable power of the hills of Mount Brookville had communicated itself to the soul of Abner and to men like him.

The question challenged, excited and frightened me a little. But I could only ask it. The answer was past my understanding.

## CHAPTER XXII

## *Clem*

THE MOOD OF MOUNT BROOKVILLE was optimism. The hills, the woods, the crops, the towering red silos, the well-fed horses, the cows with their huge bags, the post office, the stores with their shelves of manufactured goods, Elder Jepson, the Baptist church with its numerous social functions, the True Blue class with its biweekly gatherings, its "literary programs" and boisterous games, even the saloons with their shiny brass railings and gleaming mirrors, all testified to an enjoyment of life and symbolized a faith in life which the old village seldom manifested. Of course Mount Brookville was shielded from many of the sorrows that afflicted the old village. The frequent epidemics, the deaths resulting from them, the constant tussle with poverty, the earth-shaking wails of women in autumn, when young men departed for service in the army, had woven about it a mood of tragedy of which we were as continually aware as of the mud after a rain and which was as alien to Mount Brookville as the obeisance of a muzhik when in the presence of the Orthodox priest or a uniformed official. Except Abner, people in Mount Brookville didn't mourn their destiny. Jim might decry the evil powers of the Republican party or the evil ways of city traders, but he never despaired of life, never railed at the cosmic forces that ruled his existence or wept over his lowly and unworthy status in the world. Peasants in the old village, even when they were well-to-do, continually mourned their lowliness and their misfortunes, whether caused by men or by forces which they could not comprehend.

Yet the grimness of individual tragedy that Mount Brookville knew, the old village never had experienced. Its occurrence was all

the more shattering because it was rare. Consider, for example, the case of Clem Plummer.

No man in Mount Brookville was as busy and tireless as Clem. Not that he was ever in a hurry. Quite the contrary. He could no more rush with a pitchfork from one bunch of hay to another, like Bill Young, than he could lie in the shade of his yard and whistle a tune, like Bill Young. Leisurely in his method, Clem never halted in the pursuit of his aim. He was always working. If he wasn't in the field plowing, planting, hoeing, gathering crops, he was in the barn sweeping cobwebs from walls and ceilings, mending a harness, fixing tools. When not pressed with work at home, he drove around the neighborhood buying eggs, chickens, calves, vegetables, fruit, and selling it all in a house-to-house canvass in some nearby town. He was the only farmer in the township who sold directly to the consumer. Jim disposed of much of his honey through him. Other neighbors sold him their surplus fruits and vegetables. During the raspberry and blackberry season, girls like Kate Lonebeck and boys, too, not yet of working age, wandered through the pastures and woods gathering basketfuls of fresh berries for Clem.

Once in winter Clem invited me to go with him on a trip to sell Jim's honey. He had a box wagon specially fitted for peddling, and two bay horses that were as good at driving on the road as working in the fields. When we reached the first town, Clem instructed me how to peddle honey. First, he said, we would canvass the business street. He would take one side, I the other, and we were not to miss a single store. Then we would do the same in the residential district.

"Be sure to keep your box of honey right open," he instructed me, "so that when you knock at a door and a woman comes out she can see what you've got. Women round here ain't like farming folks; they don't like being bothered by peddlers, and sometimes they slam the door on them. But they hain't a-goin' to do it when they see Jim's honey. They'll be wantin' to buy it and 'll ask you the price right off. So be sure they see the honey when they open the door."

Nor did Clem exaggerate the appeal of Jim's clover and basswood honey. Seldom did I mount a porch and knock at a door

without making a sale of at least one comb. After we had finished canvassing one town, we drove to another, then to a third, and when our honey was sold, we started home. Clem was happy and so was I. Again and again he muttered, "I hain't never had no trouble sellin' Jim's honey, 'cause there hain't no better honey raised in the country."

The trip home gave me a chance to become acquainted with Clem. I had often seen him and talked to him but had never really gotten to know the man. Now that we were alone on the road I didn't mind violating the decorum of Mount Brookville, plying him with personal questions, though not of too intimate a nature. In answer to my queries he told me that he hadn't had much schooling in his youth. He had always had to work for his living and never regretted it, for work never had done him any harm.

"Folks 's always tellin' me I work too hard. But I don't think nothin' of it. Work's never done me no harm, no sir, not a bit of it."

By his own confession, then, he enjoyed working. Books didn't interest him. He never had time for them, anyway. Nor did he read regularly a daily newspaper. The only journal he liked to glance at was the Mount Brookville *Courier,* so that he would know what people in the neighborhood were doing. Church likewise held no interest for him—he didn't need anybody to tell him how to live a clean Christian life. He had sense enough to know it himself. He did his own work, never touched booze or tobacco, paid people fair prices for their produce, charged a fair profit when he sold it, didn't run around with other men's wives and took good care of his own wife and son—and that was as much as the Lord expected of a man, or as any Christian could do, anyway. Living as he was, "kind o' quiet," he had had no serious worries or troubles except when a horse had kicked his son George and injured his eyes. He took the boy to the best doctor and got him well, though his eyesight was so impaired that he would need to wear glasses all his life. A handsome lad George was, and Mary, Clem's wife, thought the world of him and so did he, and he thought the world of Mary, too. Yes, sir, he did! They were a happy family, and nothing gave him greater pleasure than to earn an honest dollar wherever he could and give it to Mary so that she

might buy pretty things for the house and for herself and the boy. Nobody in all Mount Brookville loved to fix up a house as much as Mary, and many things—like embroidered curtains, pillowcases, sofa covers—she made with her own hands, and they were prettier than any the big stores in the city were selling. I must come over some evening and see the way Mary had fixed up the house—nobody in New York had any nicer parlor. He'd bet they hadn't.

It was obvious that Clem was not only in love with Mary but was one of the happiest farmers in Mount Brookville.

Clem was a handsome man, in his late thirties. Tall, wiry, with a tanned face and neck, deep blue eyes overhung with thick dark brown lashes, a full mouth and teeth that were unspotted by tobacco smoke or tobacco juice, he had a pleasant baritone voice and spoke as unhurriedly as he moved. Neighbors respected him, even Bill Young, though now and then Bill would say, "There hain't no man nor woman neither, I tell you, that could make me work my head off like Clem's a-doin'." To which, when he heard of it, Clem replied crisply, "Work hain't never killed nobody."

Mary Plummer had the reputation of being "stuck on herself." Lillie, Bill Young's wife, never heard her name mentioned without deriding her ways and her manner. Nannie, Bill's sister, disliked Mary as much as Lillie did, and once said sourly, "She thinks she's too good to speak to common folks like us." Even Emilia admitted that there might be truth in the charge that the woman was "stuck up," while Jim, to Clem's back more than to his face, often complimented him on his superior taste in women. Mary's red wavy hair, large blue eyes, small upturned nose, broad, even-lipped mouth and the way she tossed her head when she greeted people, even those she didn't like, always arrested attention. Lillie Young freely conceded that Mary was the prettiest woman in Mount Brookville. She had in fact charged the woman's haughtiness to her looks—and "pretty clothes," she once remarked enviously, "like the kind Mary's always wearin', 'cause Clem hain't never stinted his dollars on her, hain't never spoiled no woman's looks." One thing was emphatically certain—Mary held aloof from her neighbors. Unlike her husband she never came to Jim's or Heinrich's for a

visit, and except Hattie Bancroft, who was a Normal School graduate, hardly any woman in the neighborhood ever called on her.

Once Jim sent me to bring back a tool Clem had borrowed. Mary was on the porch sewing. She invited me to sit down and wait for Clem, who had gone to the spring in the rear of the house to fetch a pail of water. With a sudden burst of animation she asked if I'd like to see the calf that Clem had given her. I said I would. Presently Clem appeared. Mary asked if he had already fed her calf, and he answered that he was just going to mix the meal in a pail of warm water. He bade us to wait, so that we could go down to the barn together. When he had the feed ready, we all walked to the barn, and there in a stall was a sprightly black-and-white calf. On smelling the feed, it frisked and danced all over the stall. Bending down on his knees, Clem held the pail, and the calf stuck its head inside and, flapping its tail and bumping its head against the sides of the pail, sucked up the feed.

"Pretty, ain't she?" asked Mary with joy.

"I hain't never known a calf," said Clem, "to fatten so quick. In two more weeks she'll be ready for the market."

"He ships them straight to New York," remarked Mary with pride, "so he can get more money for them."

"I'll bet I'll get more money for this calf than for any other I ever shipped."

"I hope so," said Mary with undisguised pleasure.

As I started for home, Mary said:

"Come over some evening for a visit."

"Yes, do, Maurice," echoed Clem cordially. "I want you to see Mary's parlor."

When I returned to Jim's I told Kent that it was ridiculous for Lillie or Nannie or any other woman to say that Mary was "stuck up." I said that I had never known a woman who was more pleasant and friendly.

"That's because she knows you're from New York," Kent snapped back. "And she always wants to make an impression on city folks. She hain't never been nice to me."

I wondered if Kent was right.

A few days later, as I passed Clem's house Mary came out and gave me a handful of early apples. I offered one to Kent, and again he insisted that Mary had taken a "shine" to me because I was from New York.

"If you was from Mount Brookville she wouldn't give ye no apples that Clem could sell."

Late in summer, Clem needed a new horse and drove to Baconsville to see Murray Read, who had just received a carload of them from Montana. After trying out several Western horses, Clem fixed his mind on a four-year-old bay mare. He wasn't yet ready to conclude a deal. He'd have to think it over and consult Mary, but no other horse had the merits of the bay mare. Heavy enough for work in the field, she wasn't too heavy for the road. Completely broken in, she was so gentle that Mary could drive her with safety. Murray assured Clem that he couldn't buy a better horse for his purposes if he went in person to the state of Montana.

Pleased that Clem had found a horse he liked, and that he had held off buying it until she had had a chance to drive the mare, Mary suggested that he send word to Murray to come down with the mare so that they could give her a good tryout in their own buggy and peddling wagon on their own roads, and see for themselves whether she was really the horse they wanted. Clem acted accordingly, and neither he nor Mary had the least suspicion what a fateful message that was—how out of it, as out of an egg of a monster, would be born a force that would blast their lives beyond all redemption.

The next day Murray Read came over with the Montana horse hitched to the side of his buggy. Since it was lunchtime, Mary invited Murray to the meal. Murray gladly accepted. He was a huge man with a fat, flushed face, ponderous hands, and small blue eyes that danced merrily whenever he talked to an attractive woman. When he smiled, his fat lips parted and his white teeth shone out of his mouth. Mary gave him a clean towel to wipe his hands, and as he took it he flashed his little eyes on her and smiled,

and she smiled back; and, as Clem later confided to Jim, that was when things must have started, though he hadn't thought anything of it at the time, since it had always given him joy to see Mary pleased with folks that might be having a meal with them.

After lunch Clem was about to hitch the bay Montana mare to his peddling wagon, but, with a sudden burst of excitement, Mary asked him to hitch the mare first to the buggy. He readily obeyed, and when the horse was hitched, Mary jumped into the buggy and, taking hold of the lines, exclaimed jubilantly:

"You'd better let me and Murray have the first ride."

"I will if you let Murray do the drivin'."

"Sure, I'll do the drivin'," said Murray, as he sidled into the seat beside Mary and took the lines away from her. With his arms folded, smiling with satisfaction, Clem saw his wife and the horse dealer drive off, and he smiled even more when he saw how easily the bay mare lifted her feet from the ground as she trotted along. He was sure that he couldn't buy a better horse for the money.

Murray and Mary drove down the turnpike and to the railroad station and back. When they returned, Mary was aglow with joyous agitation.

"She's the horse we want, Clem," she said breathlessly. "I told Murray he's never goin' to take the Montana mare back home to Baconsville."

"I ain't wantin' to take her back," answered Murray.

Clem was pleased with Mary's opinion of the horse because it was a vindication of his own judgment. To be absolutely sure he was making no mistake, he hitched the mare to the peddling wagon, and when he got into the seat he asked Mary to come along and see if the mare acted with the peddling wagon as well as with the buggy.

"I know she will," Mary answered, "without my goin' for another ride."

Clem drove off alone, and Mary stayed behind and talked to Murray.

On his return, Clem said he would buy the horse. He paid Murray cash, and Murray drove back to Baconsville, more than pleased with the transaction.

That evening, as they were having supper, Clem said to Mary:

"It's too bad Murray's been neglectin' himself. When he worked on the farm he was as skinny as I am, and now that he ain't doin' nothin' but sellin' horses he's gettin' so fat that, if he don't look out, someday he'll pop right open."

Mary made no comment on Clem's remark.

Autumn came, and every other day Clem drove to some town with his wagon loaded with produce. Usually if he didn't return in time for chores Mary milked the cows, and knowing of Mary's faithfulness he made no effort to hurry home, especially if on the way he had a chance to buy something that he could sell at a profit the next day.

One evening, on his arrival home, Mary wasn't there. Nor was George. It was past milking time, and the cows hadn't been fed or milked. Clem wondered what had happened. He milked the cows and put away the milk in the cold spring. When he returned to the house, Mary was still absent. Never had he known Mary to leave alone or with George without telling him in advance where she was going and when she was coming back. He worried lest George's eyes had of a sudden begun to bother him again and he had to be hurried to a doctor. But then—the other horse was in the barn, and so was the buggy. Mary couldn't have gone anywhere unless someone had given her a ride. And George, too, gone. Just then a horse and buggy stopped by the house, and Clem rushed out to see who it was.

"Mary," he exclaimed, "where have you been?"

The man in the buggy was Murray Read.

"Murray came by and said he was going up to Hayden and asked if I wanted to drive over and see my mother. I took George along to visit his grandmother. George's goin' to stay there a week or so."

"You could have told me that's what you was goin' to do."

"It was all so sudden, I hadn't thought of goin' until Murray came along."

"I hope you don't mind," said Murray. "I was expectin' to drive back early, but George couldn't make up his mind whether he wanted to come back or stay with his grandma."

"He wanted to come back," Mary hastened to explain, "but

Mother wouldn't let him, so we kept on arguin'. That's why we're late."

"I wish you hadn't done it without tellin' me and gettin' somebody to milk the cows," said Clem, quite heartbroken.

"But I didn't know I was going to be so late," Mary retorted with irritation.

Clem said no more. He loathed quarreling with Mary, and he knew it was no use, anyway.

Murray drove off, and Clem thanked him for bringing Mary home.

Once and sometimes twice a week Murray came by the Plummers' and took Mary for a long drive. Clem was so broken up that he went to see Jim and talk to him about his troubles. He told Jim everything, how it had all started on the day when Murray came down with the Montana mare, and how, even after he had talked to Mary, she still went out driving as often as Murray asked her. Jim listened with sympathy and said:

"A woman gets that way sometimes, Clem, and there hain't much a man can do except wait until it blows over."

"But I told her I'd drive her to Waterlane or any other place Saturday nights after chores, but she hain't never said she wanted to go. But she hain't never refused to go drivin' with Murray."

To console Clem, Jim expressed his opinion that Mary wasn't the kind to do the wrong thing. Relieved, Clem agreed.

"She hain't never been away from home all night," he said.

"I don't believe she ever will," said Jim.

"I don't hardly see how she could," said Clem, and went home with a fresh faith in Mary and a fresh hope for the continued happiness of his family.

When Emilia asked Jim if Clem was worried about "Mary's doin's with the horse dealer," Jim said:

"He hain't only worried—he's sick to his stomach. But there hain't no use tellin' a man what he ought to do if he don't know it himself. If I was him I'd kick that fat pup Murray off the premises quicker than he could breathe, and don't ye think I wouldn't, neither, an' I'd give Mary a piece of my mind, too, I'd give it to her good an' plenty, an' don't ye forget it."

"Maybe it ain't all Mary's fault."

"I hain't heard Clem say it is your'n."

"All Clem knows is work an' peddlin', an' Mary's a high-strung woman, an' don't ye say she ain't, because she is, an' I suspicion she ain't never been happy with Clem."

"What in tarnation does she want from a dirt farmer?"

"Oh, hush, ye ain't never been married much, an' ye ain't fit to discuss such things. Besides, some things ain't nobody's business."

Jim gave a grunt and made no reply.

One day Clem came to Jim's house and asked Emilia if she knew where Jim was.

"Out in the barn, I guess," said Emilia.

"Well, Emilia, this is the last day I'm a-goin' to live," he said.

"What are you talkin' about?"

"I said this is the last day I'm a-goin' to live."

"Ye don't look sick."

"It's got nothin' to do with the way I look."

"Pshaw," said Emilia, "ye ain't that foolish."

"Maybe I'm more foolish than you think."

"No, ye hain't, I know ye hain't."

As he walked out of the house, he ran into Jim.

"Jim," he said, "I am a-goin' down your swamp to drown myself in the river."

"Like hell ye hain't."

"Like hell I am. Good-by, Jim."

Jim looked at him and shouted:

"I've got a lot more honey comin' out of the hives soon, and ye've got to sell it for me."

Clem didn't answer.

When Jim got into the house, Emilia told him of Clem's visit and what he had said about it being the last day he was going to live. Jim repeated to her Clem's words about going down to the swamp and drowning himself in the river.

"Ye don't think he meant it?" asked Emilia.

"Of course he hain't, no more than I would if I'd said it to him. It don't make no difference how much hell Mary's raisin', Clem likes peddlin' too much to be thinkin' of killin' himself."

Emilia agreed—the man talked as if he had been temporarily out of his mind and didn't mean a thing he said.

In the evening a party of neighbors went down to the swamp in search of Clem. The water in the river was so shallow that a baby couldn't drown in it. They found Clem in a mudhole. He had poked his head deep into the mud and kept it there until he was dead.

I had never known or heard of anyone in the old village committing suicide.

## CHAPTER XXIII

## *The Bountiful Harvest*

I HAD LIVED AND WORKED in the Mount Brookville country over three years, the most exciting, most enlightening, most transforming years of my life. I knew by name not only the side roads, the wood lots, the hills, the valleys, but most of the people. On Sundays and holidays, when I was excused from milking and other chores, I wandered over the countryside, now following a road, now cutting across a field, now straying into a wood, now ascending a hill. Whether in midsummer, with the rolling and brush-grown pastures loaded with berries, or in midwinter, with the earth decked knee deep or waist high with snow, I never ceased to marvel at the rugged grandeur and the magnificent plenteousness of the country. Here were clouds, colors, horizons that stirred joy and sometimes awe, and here all winter, as if in defiance of the violent winds and of all the destructive powers of nature, unwanted apples clung to trees with the tenacity of grass clinging to the earth.

Once on my way home from school I was caught in a blizzard, and while wading strenuously in deep snow I became thirsty. I never liked snow and, besides, it never slaked my thirst, so I refrained from throwing handfuls of it into my mouth. Instead I pulled a frozen apple from a tree in a pasture and bit off a piece. When it melted in my mouth it tasted so juicy and refreshing that I ate it all. The next day, as I was returning from school, I picked a pocketful of frozen apples, brought them home, thawed them

and found them more delicious than baked apples. In my enthusiasm I urged Jim to try one, but he laughed at the idea.

"That ain't good eatin'!" he said reproachfully.

"It is," I protested. "Just try it."

"I hain't got a mind to do no such thing," he snapped back, "no more than I've got a mind to taste frozen turd."

I was no more successful in getting Bill Young or his wife Lillie to taste frozen apples, and when I offered one to his oldest girl he shouted at her not to dare touch it. Perhaps it was because people in Mount Brookville had barrels and bins filled with fresh apples, especially the delectable Northern Spy, that they showed such implacable hostility to frozen ones. I liked them so much that in early spring I searched the pastures for apple trees with surviving fruit. Whenever I found any I ate it with as much relish as the cucumbers that Jim picked for me in summer in his garden. Indeed, hunting for frozen apples had become an enjoyable adventure.

I was no Bill Young or Tim Milburn, and I could not tell birds and animals as they could. But one need be no expert on wild life to enjoy sudden encounters with it in wood and field. During my long walks in summer and autumn it was exciting to come on a pheasant flapping noisily out of a bush, or a partridge scared into swift flight, or a rabbit scampering wildly for his life. The more pompous and calculating woodchuck would rise on his haunches, listen, waddle off a little closer to his hole, rise up again, listen once more and continue this play with danger and death for some time before scuttling underground. As a farmer I knew the damage that rabbits and woodchucks did to gardens and to field crops, and I didn't mind seeing them exterminated. When I worked for Heinrich Friedhof and Rover came home with a dead woodchuck in her teeth and laid it at my feet, I was unmoved. Yet ever since the evening when I had helped Bill Young drown the mother woodchuck out of her hole and had seen her heroic fight with the dog, I stopped killing things with my own hand. I wouldn't go hunting with Bill Young or with Tim Milburn. I wouldn't even handle a rifle.

Throughout my stay in Mount Brookville, in my mind I was living in two worlds, the old village and the new. I saw the old vil-

lage with the eyes I had newly acquired in Mount Brookville, and I saw Mount Brookville with the eyes I had brought from the old village. The contrasts were as staggering as they were illuminating. The similarities were few. In Mount Brookville I had learned to address people by their first name, precisely as in the old village. John Roadsdell was old enough to be my grandfather, yet I could never address him as "Mr Roadsdell," because nobody else ever did. He was just John to everybody. True, nobody ever addressed or spoke about Elder Jepson by his first name. Always it was "elder" or "the elder." Mrs Schupps, the most devout member of the Baptist church, and John Roadsdell, who never crossed its threshold, were equally informal in so speaking of or to him.

The principal of the school was the only other person who was never addressed by his first name. The outstanding intellectual in the village, more so than the elder, because he had been to college and the elder hadn't, he had a title. He was the professor, and old and young addressed him by that title. Not even Charlie Horton, who at one time had amassed a small fortune making buggies and who was now so feeble that his hands shook as with the palsy and so old that he could barely drag his feet as he walked, was "mistered" by anybody, not even by the small boys. Always it was "Charlie" and not "Mr Horton."

This familiarity, however, extended only to men. Chivalry had had its inning in Mount Brookville and barred too familiar an approach to women. Nobody ever thought of addressing Mrs Schupps as "Kate" or "Katherine," not even the elder. I often visited John Roadsdell's home and had meals there, and never did I allow myself to address his wife as "Hattie." During all the time that I worked for Jim, neither I nor Kent ever called Emilia by her first name. Always it was "Mrs Atwater," and to the day of her death I never felt it proper to speak of Nell Loneback as "Nell," nor did Heinrich or anybody else except Abner and Jim, and they were years older than she. The deferences to women were as much a part of the lore of Mount Brookville as the majestic coloring of its autumn skies.

In the old village we were even more humbly informal. Chivalry had never touched us. Ages ago on its march eastward from the Western world it got stuck in the Russian mud and was still await-

ing the day of its rescue. So in our salutations we never drew the line between men and women. Unlike peasants in Great Russia, just north of us, our muzhiks never even used the patronymic. Always it was "Stepan" or "Lukyan," "Varvara" or "Avdotya." We did show deference to age. Older people we addressed as "Uncle" or "Aunt," and the very old, those with gray or white hair, as "Grandfather" or "Grandmother," even if they had no grandchildren. The forms of "Mister" and "Mistress" were reserved for city people or for those dressed in factory-made clothes. Officials commanded special recognition. The priest was "Little Father," the township clerk was "Mister Writer," the constable was "Mister Constable," and the landlord was elevated to a pedestal all his own —as "Your Nobility" or "Your Mercifulness." Our muzhiks were thus constantly reminded of their inferior position before man and God, a form of servitude which Mount Brookville never had known. Even as lowly a man as Bill Young would be quick to resent and perhaps to avenge the insinuation that he was not as good as "any damned preacher man" or "any city slicker." Jim, of course, held himself immensely superior to most of the people in the county because he was a Democrat and they were Republicans.

In Mount Brookville strangers were introduced to each other. In the old village introductions were unknown. People just talked and got acquainted. If a stranger ever stopped at our house—that is, opened the door without knocking and walked in and made himself at home in the living room—Father would ask him who he was and where he had come from. Father might be curious enough to pry into the man's life history, or he into Father's, and any stranger was at liberty to stop at any house in the village any time of the day or the night and to ask any questions he chose. In Mount Brookville, of course, strangers never were accorded such liberties, though no man ever stopped at a kitchen door and asked for vittles but got it, unless the man of the house happened to be around and insisted that he first pay for his vittles, not in money, but in work in the woodshed or the barn.

Likewise the decorum of Mount Brookville demanded that on being introduced to each other men shake hands, unless they happened to be in separate buggies or milk wagons and too far apart from each other, or for some other reason found it incon-

venient or lacked the desire to do so. When men were introduced to women, they might dispense with handshaking. A bow was proper enough. When a man met a woman acquaintance in the street, he of course bowed and spoke to her. Unlike landlords in the old village, or the priest and his sons, or students and teachers in the Gymnasium in the town where I had attended school, they never removed their hats before women, nor did they bow as low. A nod of the head was good enough. Muzhiks of course never removed their caps before one another, men or women. Only in the presence of superiors—officials, landlords, or people dressed in city clothes—did they bare their heads. Nor were they given to handshaking. At the time that I left the old village the practice had only been introduced by an alert and worldly young man who had returned from seven years' service in the czarist fleet. It was confined only to young people—that is, to youths who had not yet been wedded. The sailor's purpose was to bring culture to our people, the culture that he had observed among his officers. When he sought to extend it to the point of having young men greet girls with the expression *moyo pochtenye* (my esteemed one), the boys balked, and he abandoned the campaign, though he himself persisted in the use of the salutation. At first the girls were so amused and embarrassed that they blushed and laughed.

Save, then, for the fact that people in the old village and in Mount Brookville lived on the land and earned their living from the land and were relatively informal in their approach to one another, their worlds and cultures were generations, perhaps centuries, apart; and it was not always the old village that was the more aged and the new village that was the more youthful.

I often wondered what Jim would have said had he of a sudden been transplanted to the old village. He would have been entranced with the songs, the dances, the decorations and the ceremonials during holidays. He would have been amused or perhaps even annoyed with the impassioned efforts of the muzhik to uncover in public the story of his life. But on sight of the heaps of manure in front of the houses, in the street, the windowless cow stables, the wooden harrows, the unbrushed horses, the surly dogs, his oaths would have boiled the very mud in the streets. I won-

dered no less what Blind Sergey would have said had he come to live with Jim. The hay tedder alone would have made him gasp with as much wonder as any deed he ever had ascribed to the Evil One.

In the light of the culture of Mount Brookville the old village was enormously aged, and yet had not even been born.

It was only during my stay in Mount Brookville that I began to be worried about the petty thievery in the old village. After Jim had blasted me with a mouthful of oaths for my offer to steal a mess of raspberries for shortcake from a neighbor's berry patch, I realized as never before the virtue of personal rectitude, so formidable a feature of the civilization of Mount Brookville, so shaky a trait in many of the people in the old village. But Mount Brookville had done more than waken me to a realization of this divergence in personal uprightness. It supplied also an explanation for its cause.

Once, in passing Henry Norton's orchard, I said:

"Henry, why d'you let tons of apples go to waste in your orchard?"

"Hain't got time to pick 'em. If you want any, go ahead and help yourself."

No man in the old village would have said "help yourself" to any neighbor, even if the orchard had gleamed as red with fallen apples as did Henry Norton's. He might give a neighbor an apple—a pocketful, a bosomful of apples—but would never allow him the privilege of foraging at will among his fruit trees. Had he done so, he would have had no apples left, and even if he was well-to-do he needed apples, to eat with bread, to dry in the sun, to make soup from on feast days. In my boyhood I raided orchards and gardens because the reward was so tempting. Here there was no reward. At Jim's and at Heinrich's we had more apples and pears than we could eat. We fed barrels of both to pigs and cows and now and then a piece at a time to the horses. Whenever I walked through Heinrich's pasture and saw the large raspberries and blackberries gleaming in the sun, and going to waste because we didn't need any and other people didn't bother to pick them, I was overwhelmed with awe and sometimes with distress at the wasteful abundance of Mount Brookville. What was true of fruit, small and

large, was true of turnips, carrots, cucumbers. There was so much of everything on the farms where I worked that I had not the least excuse for stealing anything from a neighbor.

In Russia petty thievery still is a widespread pastime, as tourists who have traveled on Russian trains and taken their eyes off their baggage, if only to look around a railroad station, can eloquently testify. Abundance more than propaganda will eventually cure the evil. Yet publicly the old village condemned the practice no less vehemently than did Mount Brookville.

In Mount Brookville all winter long we ate preserved berries, pears, peaches, beets and other vegetables. Emilia spent weeks canning things, and Jim's basement, even in the dark, gleamed with glass jars. As poor a man as Bill Young could afford the sugar and the glassware that his wife Lillie needed for preserves. In the old village nobody could afford the sugar or the glassware. Besides, nobody had heard of such a way of putting up fruit and vegetables. The women dried fruit in the sun, pickled large cucumbers, made sauerkraut, which when eaten with potatoes and black bread made an appetizing meal.

In Mount Brookville when cucumbers grew large they were not even picked. They were allowed to grow still larger and turn yellow and rot, unless they were gathered in time and used for seed. Women used only the very little ones for pickling. In the old village it was sacrilege to touch a small cucumber, because if left for a few more days on the vine it would have grown into so many more mouthfuls of food. Nothing roused Mother's anger more than to see any of us pick a small cucumber, and if we ever did so, we ate it quickly and destroyed all evidence of the transgression. The large cucumbers might be green or they might be turning yellow—their color did not matter as much as their size—and during the winter months they were as indispensable to our meals as were potatoes and bread.

In summer, before starting for a field I would ask Jim to pick me a handful of large cucumbers to take along and munch while working. He did it gladly enough, though never without a good-humored sneer or an oath. Whenever he and Kent saw me eat a cucumber as it came off the vine, unwashed, unpeeled, uncut, they

would roar with laughter and prophesy that I should be "as sick as a dog," and when I wasn't, they marveled at my constitution and assured me that, had they done likewise, they'd be down in a furrow, doubled up with the bellyache. Then I would roar with laughter. In the old village I had never heard of people getting sick from eating cucumbers of any size, in any way, at any time, during or after a meal or before retiring for the night. But I had heard of people often being fed cucumbers when they were sick to make them well.

For a long time I marveled at the dogs of Mount Brookville. They might bark at strangers, but they readily responded to a friendly snap of the fingers, a merry whistle, a cheerful word. I had never heard, in all the time that I lived there, of a single dog biting a human being. After my encounter with the manager of the milk station on the morning of my arrival from New York, I never again threw rocks or mudballs at dogs, and never bothered to carry a cane as a protection against sudden attack. I ceased to fear dogs. I sought only to make friends with them. In the old village puppies alone responded to a friendly approach. Grown dogs seldom did, nor did people want them to, for then they could not be depended on to frighten away possible thieves.

In the old village dogs were a symbol of the ugliness of life; in Mount Brookville they were a symbol of the friendliness of the country.

Nor were dogs the only animals who knew man's comradeship. Jim gave his cows and horses names, and if a hired man got the names confused he was sure to be cursed for it. In the old village dogs always had names, horses sometimes, cows never. Here, when cows were milked, the udders were fitted into the fists and gently pressed; in the old village the udders were stripped tightly by clutching fingers. The difference in comfort to the cow, to the man, and in the time consumed in the task was immense. Here pigs got so fat that they could barely stand on their legs, especially in autumn, when they were fed all the corn they could eat, if that were possible. They never had to grub for any part of their living. In the old village, with few notable exceptions, because they did have to root for a large part of their food wherever they

could find it, up to the very day when their throats were slit with a narrow knife, pigs could give good account of themselves in a battle with a dog or a grown heifer. Here a man like Jim felt himself anointed by God to protect from abuse all living things in his barns. If ever he let his temper run away with him and beat a cow, he lashed out at himself no less scathingly than he would have at me or Kent. Even dogs were trained to drive cattle gently, never to bite or chase them.

The old village would have been puzzled by Jim's solicitude. The little boys who drove cows and sheep and horses and pigs to pasture had enormously long whips and lashed an erring animal even in the presence of its owner. In the light of my experience in Mount Brookville nothing seemed more pathetic about the old village than its cruelty to animals, which lack of schooling and continuous privation kept perpetuating from generation to generation, and nothing seemed more cheering and more lofty in the civilization of Mount Brookville than man's friendliness to domestic animals. It added grace, joy and nobility to farming and to living.

Here every farmer subscribed at least to the Mount Brookville *Courier* so as to learn the local gossip. Most of them received papers from the near-by city and even from New York, and nearly every man read at least one agricultural journal. In the old village, if a peasant came into possession of a newspaper he used it chiefly for cigarette paper.

Here, among Protestants, church membership or church attendance was optional. People like Jim, Bill Young and Clem, who never went to church, considered themselves as good Christians as Mrs Schupps, who never missed a prayer meeting on Wednesday evenings. Had anyone called them infidels, they would have laughed with amusement, perhaps with scorn. Hadn't Bill Young, when I asked him if he was an atheist, snapped back with the words, "I hain't no such damned fool"? Jim, no doubt, would have said, "I hain't no such goddam fool." I had heard of no infidels in Mount Brookville, not one. Robert Ingersoll's quarrels with Jehovah never had reached the ears of its inhabitants, which was a real consolation to Elder Jepson, though at times he showed

no little dismay at his failure to stir believers like Jim, Alonzo, Clem, Abner, Bill Young and many others into a desire for closer communion with God by means of attendance at church. Publicly the elder never denounced these citizens, nor remonstrated with them. Indeed, when called upon for aid, in time of sickness, death, or any occasion festive or tragic, he never discriminated against nonchurchgoers. He was generous with God's blessings to all those who felt in need of them. His most far-reaching ministrations began when he was out of the pulpit and out of the church.

In the old village a Christian was born into the Orthodox Church. He remained Orthodox to the end of his days. He had no other choice, for there were no members of any other Christian persuasion within its boundaries. He went to Mass less frequently than he would have had the church been near by and not in another village, though not even storms prevented him from going on high holidays. But outside of religious ministrations he made no contacts with the Little Father, and the Little Father made no effort to cultivate such contacts. He felt no need for it. He was separated from his parishioners not only by his superior education and his superior mode of living—next to the church, his house was the most impressive structure in the village—but by his very calling. Unlike Elder Jepson he was a shepherd who never lost himself in his flock. He and the muzhik might be living side by side, but they belonged to worlds that were hopelessly apart from one another.

In Mount Brookville holidays meant rest and quiet. Older people slept late and didn't mind milking cows an hour later than on workdays. Afternoons they took long naps. Young people might go riding in buggies, play baseball, go to a near-by lake for a swim, but they refrained from holding parties and engaging in gay festivities. The saloons, the stores, even the one bakery shop, which sometimes sold ice cream, were closed. On Sundays the wants of the flesh were supposed to be held in check. Not so in the old village. There, on Sundays and holidays, the wants of the flesh attained their richest fulfillment. These days were occasions for a mouthful of white bread, a lump of sugar, brightest ribbons in a girl's hair, the display of leather boots, vodka drinking for the old, singing, dancing, courting, lovemaking for the young. Re-

straint, other than what local usage decreed, was neither counseled nor countenanced. It was a time for legend, drama, ceremonial, and boisterous enjoyment.

It was when I thought of holidays that I felt the enormous age of the old village and the unmeasured youth of the new, just as, when I thought of the hay tedder, I grasped the enormous age of the new—and that the old was as yet unborn.

Mount Brookville was always aware of its dignity and good manners. During my first meal at Jim's, when I had mistaken milk gravy for soup and had eaten it as such with a tablespoon, neither Emilia nor Jim had indicated in any way that they had seen it, or showed disapproval or annoyance, and even Kent waited until we were outside before, laughing at me, he enlightened me gruffly of my error. In the old village so learned a man as Blind Sergey would have made me aware of it the moment he saw me dip the tablespoon into the gravy. Had Elder Jepson lived there, and had he resented my successful effort to swing the True Blues into giving him for Christmas Milton's *Paradise Lost,* which he might not even understand, instead of a pair of fur-lined leather gloves, which he sorely needed, he would have scorched me with his scorn. If a crowd of villagers had heard the castigation, he would have taken the more pleasure in it. But Elder Jepson in Mount Brookville never alluded to the subject, and it was only my own conscience that tormented me whenever I saw him wearing his old gloves.

The outward restraint and inner discipline of Mount Brookville were in striking contrast to the outward expansiveness and inner impulsiveness of the old village. I couldn't imagine anyone in the old village acting as subdued in a moment of bereavement as did people in Mount Brookville, especially the women. To this day I remember the wild laments of Adarya, Mother's best friend, when her one-year-old daughter, Anna, died. "Why have you deserted me, my precious darling?" she had wailed at the top of her voice, "when I love you so much? Who could need you and love you more than I do? Why must I be like a broken-off twig blown about by the wind—why, oh why?"

I was glad I had fled from New York and had come to Mount Brookville. It was the America I had yearned for and needed to know. It had not sundered itself from me, as had New York, and hidden behind barriers that exasperated and terrified and that I saw no hope of ever surmounting. It was as open to me as were the fields where I worked and where I loved to ramble. That was why I had quickly gotten "the hang of things" with tools, livestock, fruit trees, bees, language, people, with almost everything except the girls, which puzzled the girls as much as it did me. Here was one nook of the vast world of mankind in which neither race nor religion nor class mattered. Made up of dirt farmers, it extended a glad "howdy" to all others who sought to whip their living out of the soil. Protestant as it was, I had never known it to manifest, in word or act, any antipathy toward Catholic, Jew or alien. One of my close friends, a Protestant boy, fell in love with a Catholic girl, and for a long time the difference in religion kept them from marriage. But neither the boy's mother, who was a devout Baptist, nor any of his numerous sisters, who likewise were devoted members of Elder Jepson's church, ever made the girl feel uncomfortable, or ever hinted to the boy or to neighbors their disapproval of the match because she was of another faith. The remarkable tolerance of the people was as much a part of their folkways as the hills were of the rugged grandeur of the country.

Of course the outside world, with its conflicts and consummations, had not been a part of my life or my experience, because it had not been a part of the life and the experience of Mount Brookville. Save for its incessant distrust of New York milk dealers and commission men, Mount Brookville had no grievances against the outside world. Only Jim was an exception. Associating Republican rule with doom, he made sure that every Republican he met was clamorously apprised of his sentiments. Labor, capital, the trials and conflicts that grew out of their relationship with each other, like the trials and conflicts that grew out of the relationships of foreign governments and nations with one another, barely reached our ears, and when they did, they roused no ripple of emotion. Only Elder Jepson and the occasional visiting foreign missionary or evangelist sought to transform man and the world by bringing them into the fold of their creed, and there were no ideologists or

social prophets to upset the self-confidence and the tranquillity of the people. No matter how deeply I might be disturbed by the novels of Hardy or Turgenev, I was no longer given to brooding over the endless tragedies and the futilities of life. I had not time for *Weltschmerz,* and besides, contact with things that grew almost before my eyes inspired a hope and a contentment that quickly banished doubts and torments.

I had taken Regents' examinations in advanced high-school subjects and passed them and, feeling that I was qualified in book knowledge and in practical experience to carry on classwork at the State College of Agriculture at Cornell, I wrote to the registrar for a catalogue and an admission blank. Thrilled with the fat envelope that promptly arrived, I sat up all night reading its closely printed pages and exciting myself with the descriptions of the numerous subjects that I might soon be studying. The next day I mailed back the admission blank with all the questions answered. My heart thumped with excitement when I received another letter from the registrar, and it sank with dismay when I read it. He informed me that I had not enough credits to qualify for admission. I wrote again, a long letter, assuring him that I could carry on my studies and work off my conditions in the first year and pleading for a chance to be allowed to do so. He answered that my request was impossible and advised me to attend high school for another year. So firmly had I resolved on going to college that the very thought of postponement stirred me to indignation. I wrote to the dean of the college in the hope that he would overrule the registrar. Instead, he upheld him. I went to see one of the trustees who lived in a town some distance away, and he promised to intercede on my behalf, but held out no hope of inducing the dean or the registrar to change their minds. Rules were rules and could not be violated.

Perplexed and saddened, I wondered what I was to do. Elder Jepson advised that I try another college. But I wanted to study agriculture, and at the moment I was interested in no other subject and in no other profession. Yet the more I thought of the elder's suggestion the more sensible it sounded. I might go to some other

college for a year. It would be more exciting and more enlightening than spending the time in high school.

But which college should it be? I had to think of finances because as a farmhand I had not saved much money. At the State College of Agriculture I shouldn't be required to pay a tuition fee, but at some other college I might not be exempted from this expense. Besides, I wouldn't think of attending college in a city. I had no love for the city—any city—and no desire to live in one. If I went to a college in the country I might find a place on a farm to milk cows and do chores mornings and evenings in return for board and room. That, of course, would be an advantage. I discussed the problem with Elder Jepson, and being a good Baptist he suggested Colgate University.

I had seen the place once. During my stay with Jim, he and I had been summoned to the county seat as witnesses in an arson case in our neighborhood. On our way we passed the grounds of Colgate University, and when I asked Jim what kind of place it was, he answered, "That's where them big preachers come from." The words stuck in my mind, and since I had no desire to preach any religious gospel, I told Elder Jepson that Colgate was no college for a young man who only wanted to be a farmer. But the elder informed me that the theological seminary was only a small part of the institution, and that hundreds of boys were entering the college with no thought of ever giving themselves to the ministry. He expressed his regret that he never had gone there, because a college education would have helped him in his life work.

"Write to them and see what happens," he advised.

I followed his advice and waited with trepidation for a reply. It came promptly, and it was no more encouraging than the reply of the registrar from the State College of Agriculture at Cornell. I was more disheartened than ever. These mathematical calculations of a man's studies seemed to be absurd. If I could pass Regents' examinations in some subjects without taking them in school, merely by studying at home, why couldn't I pursue the work, however difficult, in college and simultaneously work off my conditions? I wrote the Colgate dean another letter setting forth my views in some detail and pleading for a chance to prove my contention. The reply came that I should be given that chance.

As I was on my way to the railroad station with a trunkful of books and with the few personal effects which I had bought from a Chicago mail-order house, I had no thought that I was on my way not only to college but to a destiny and a profession of which at the time I had not dreamed. Nor had I the least inkling of how priceless Jim's "higher learning" would be in later years, when I was to write my books on Russia. Indeed, without this learning I very much doubt that those books would ever have been written.

PART FOUR

# Tall Timber

CHAPTER XXIV

## *The Trees and the Wood*

ONE OF MY MOST VIVID RECOLLECTIONS of my first visit to Russia after the Revolution was a mass meeting in the city of Minsk. The year was 1923. Among the speakers was a young American who had announced himself as a representative of a society of Friends of the Russian Revolution. In the course of the address he proclaimed with enthusiasm, "Our American farmers are with you! Our steel workers are with you! Our coal miners are with you! Our textile workers are with you! All of the work people of America are with you!" Hearing him speak, one would imagine that at any moment a signal would be waved and the American Revolution would erupt into being, with millions of farmers, steel workers, coal miners, textile workers, office clerks, school teachers marching with red banners down the main avenues of large cities and most distant hamlets, singing the "International." On the conclusion of his address I jostled my way to the platform and said to him:

"What good do you think you're accomplishing by telling such falsehoods?"

"Falsehoods?" he stormed indignantly. "It's the truth I have told them."

He was one of a conspicuous group of American romantics who were flocking to Russia in those days of the "breathing spell" of the Revolution. For a time revolutionary leaders eagerly and hopefully lent their oversensitive ears to these prophets of the American Revolution. To this day there are workers, peasants, intellectuals in Russia who, when they meet Americans, ask what happened to the Revolution, of whose coming American comrades had at one time so spiritedly assured them. Russian leaders soon tired of these gladiators of the word and spoke of them with undisguised contempt.

The whole period of NEP (New Economic Policy) and of the first Five-Year Plan was a curious time for Russia and for American romantics in Russia. There were not many of them, but they managed to pop up in most unexpected places with all manner of schemes and panaceas for Russia, the Revolution, the world. One elderly man from a Western state, who said he had been a Socialist all his life, came over to look at the land of his dreams, with the intent of going back home to pull up stakes and then to return and spend his remaining years in the one country where people were no longer battered down by capitalist exploitation. After only a few days in Moscow he concluded that the worst enemy Russian socialism was facing was the housefly. He immediately set to work in his room in the hotel to perfect a cheap and effective fly swatter, which the Soviets could distribute by the millions all over the country and thus wage a relentless war on the dread foe of the new society. When he could not persuade anyone, not even the chambermaids at his hotel, that at the moment this was the most pressing task of the Revolution, he packed his baggage and went back home, an angry and disillusioned man.

Another American romantic, a serious-looking youth, would sit by the hour all alone at a table in the dining room of the leading tourist hotel in Moscow and smoke and drink and look out of the window, or at people in the room, with a brooding expression. In a burst of confidence he once told me that he had come to represent a friend of his, an engineer, who had invented an electric ray that could smite down regiments of soldiers miles away. He wanted to sell the invention to the Soviets, so that if they were forced into a war they could quickly wipe out the armies of the capitalist nations and enthrone Utopia all over the world. I never learned what finally happened to him.

By far the most numerous group of romantics came not to help build but to live in Utopia All their lives they had dreamed of escape from themselves and from the world about them into a socialist heaven. They had given their energies, their substance, their loves and even more their hates to promoting its slogans, its programs, its struggles, its feuds—so they stalwartly proclaimed. America was a barbaric land that clubbed, arrested, electrocuted men like them, but Russia had achieved the ultimate redemption of the

human being, and they could not wait for the time when America had done likewise.

As late as 1931 one of these romantics happened to be on a Soviet steamer on the way from London to Leningrad with a large group of distinguished British journalists. All the way over he sermonized on the grandeur of Soviet socialism, and when his words were disputed he argued heatedly that even distinguished British writers had much to learn about Russian reality. On their arrival they would see it and feel it and be transformed by it, and might even apologize for their aspersions on his assurances. As for himself, he didn't think he should want to go back to America. He would live in a land of freedom, comradeship and everlasting happiness.

Several days after the arrival of this delegation in Moscow, I was having lunch with one of its members in the hotel in which I was stopping. On seeing the young American romantic, my British friend hailed him and asked how he liked his Utopia now that he had lived in it for several days. Dismally he shook his head. It wasn't at all what he had expected. In fact it wasn't any good. He wouldn't think of staying. He was leaving in a few days and would never care to return. What could he think of a country where, in one of the leading hotels, he was served for breakfast, not grapefruit, but *cucumbers?*

On another occasion, after crossing the Polish border on my way from Moscow to Berlin, I became acquainted with a young American who had won a trip to Russia from an organization with which he was affiliated. On leaving New York he was assured that in no country in the world were people so happy and hopeful as in Russia. Now he knew better. He would resign from that confounded organization. He had had to wait in line for over an hour to buy a handkerchief in Moscow. He had called on friends of his wife who had their home in the city, and they could buy neither sugar nor butter. Besides, his room in the hotel was infested with bedbugs, and he hadn't had a single night's peaceful sleep all the time he had stayed in Moscow. To him the Revolution was collapsing, because nothing he had seen in Moscow was as good as in New York.

Had I, after my arrival in this country, remained in New York,

in the part of the city in which I had lived, perhaps I too in sheer rebellion against the tenements, the garbage, the signs of "Keep Off the Grass" over the patches of greensward in the parks, would have been fired with a crusading spirit and with an insatiable hunger for an immediate taste of heaven. Had the chance presented itself for me to go to Russia on a journalistic errand, I might have flung myself as had others, and with no less enthusiasm than they, into this impassioned search for Utopia.

I watched these romantics from the earliest days of my journeyings in Russia, naive and ardent youths who had never blistered their hands with a manure fork, who in fact didn't know the difference between a manure fork and a pitchfork, a scythe and a cradle, who had never had their eyes reddened while scattering lime on land or their noses pricked while emptying sacks of phosphate into grain drills, who couldn't tell a Guernsey from a Jersey, a Poland China from a Berkshire, who couldn't recognize a Rhode Island Red if they saw one, who couldn't for their life tell the difference between a properly tilled seed bed and one "with them lumps stickin' out of the ground like elephants," as Jim had once shouted at me; who, in short, had never for a moment paused to think of the importance of getting "the hang of things" with tools and livestock and land in any society, above all in a society that was not only aspiring but, as they had so presumptuously imagined, was a fulfillment of Utopia. They had been living in a world of fancies and illusions and had not the remotest appreciation of the realities of the earth, especially the age-old shattering realities of the Russian earth. That Russia had been slaughtered in a World War; that the slaughtering continued in a subsequent civil war; that a gruesome famine had devastated vast regions of the land; that the Revolution had built up a Cheka that was brutally smiting down enemies or those suspected of being enemies; that peasant lands had since time immemorial been cut into narrow strips with interminable weed-breeding ridges or dead furrows separating them from one another, thus making utterly impossible a rational and modern method of tillage; that in such provinces as Voronoezh, Valdimir, Tambov, Ryazan, the whole of White Russia, peasants had for centuries been living in one-room huts which in winter they had shared with pigs, sheep, sometimes

with a cow; that in these provinces and in others peasants, with rare exceptions, had not even discovered privies; that this formidable destruction and backwardness had created problems that needed desperately to be solved before there could even be decent shelter and food in the country—these things did not matter to these American romantics. They knew their slogans, their theories, their grandiloquent rhetoric, and not even the periodic famines to which Russia had been subjected for over a thousand years, and of which countless books had been written by some of the ablest minds under czarism, gave them any pause in their assiduous quest of Utopia. They had quaffed so deep of the wines of fancy that their heads reeled with absurd expectations. That which was only an historic and arduous process, indeed the beginning of a process, they had acclaimed as a hallowed fulfillment. To me they were as pathetic in their hopes as they now are in their recantations. Formerly, whenever they saw blood they cried that it was a rosebush; now, whenever they see a rosebush they scream that it is blood!

My experience in a Russian village as a boy and my years on a farm in Mount Brookville had prepared me for an altogether different approach to the Russian Revolution. I had never mistaken the word for the achievement. The blueprint of the Revolution for a future society, however stirring, was one thing; the purely Russian problem that the Revolution had to solve, as an indispensable prerequisite for such a society or even for individual and national survival, was quite another. I had never searched for a heaven on this earth, and if I had I should most emphatically not have turned my eyes to Russia, whose many-millioned peasantry had to learn "the hang of things" with land, livestock, tools, before they could even be assured of an uninterrupted supply of bread. I only had to think of the way Jim treated cows, pigs, horses, dogs, and the way these animals were cared for in the old village, to appreciate the enormity of the purely Russian task that the Revolution was facing or that any government in Russia would need to solve to make sheer physical existence tolerable. Unencumbered as I was with crusading slogans, "The Communist Manifesto" meant to me little or nothing compared to a good stand of wheat, a field

of square-cornered cabbage, or a cow stable with a clean floor and abundant sunlight.

In 1922 I had spent several months among the Russian Doukhobors in western Canada. I had dreamed of visiting these apostles of physical toil and physical nonresistance since the time I had first heard of their flight from their homeland. With the help of Tolstoy (who turned over to them the earnings from his novel *Resurrection*) and the Society of Friends, the Doukhobors, to escape persecution for their religious and pacifist beliefs, had migrated to Canada in 1899 and settled on virgin and sometimes on wild lands. One glance at their magnificent wheat fields, truck farms, orchards would convince anyone of the innate capacity of the Russian peasant to get "the hang of things" of modern farming. All the more remarkable was this achievement because the religion of these people and their espousal of primitive communism had brought them into sharp conflict with the social forces of the machine age and with the political aims of the government under which they were living. In spite of immense difficulties they had preserved their religion, their communist practices, as well as their native usages, their songs, their language.

During my stay with them in Saskatchewan and in British Columbia I was especially impressed with the magnificent quality of their speech. Words and phrases dipped in imagery and sentiment spouted out of them with the ease of water surging out of a spring. Again and again I found myself jotting down the remarks of the men and women whom I met or in whose homes I happened to be staying. I collected these snatches of dialogue and sent them to Glenn Frank, who was then editor of the *Century Magazine*. Frank wrote that the conversations were impressive but that they would need to be woven into a connected narrative to make them acceptable. This I wrote and sent it off. Shortly afterwards I received from Frank a communication, the sight of which, unread, stirred speculation and agitation. As it was in a small envelope, I knew that the manuscript had not been rejected. Hopefully I tore it open, and enclosed was a check and a note asking me to write another piece.

My next article was about the Freedomites, a sect which had

broken away from the Doukhobors, because to them the adoption of the modern machine was a profanation of their faith and a direct insult to God. So vehement was their rebellion against the machine that they wouldn't use anything made by it—neither tool, nor utensil, nor clothes, nor food. They lived in the mountains, eating raw foods—cereals, fruits, vegetables—and going naked in summer. Now and then they would start on a religious pilgrimage to voice their protest against the heretical Doukhobors and against the machine age and the civilization that it had reared. They would descend on a community, gather in the public square, sing hymns and then throw off their clothes and proceed with the religious services. Naturally they were in continual difficulties with the Canadian authorities. However, in the weeks that I lived with them in the mountains of British Columbia I gathered enough material for an article, and when I sent it to Glenn Frank he accepted it.

This was the beginning of my journalistic career. Frank was the first magazine editor who not only accepted my work but encouraged me to go on writing. If he didn't like a piece I submitted, he would call me in and explain how I could reconstruct it so as to make it acceptable. To him more than to anyone I am indebted for what little I have learned of the architecture of literary composition, which had been my chief difficulty.

On my return to New York I went to see the editor of the *Century Magazine*. I told him that I thought there was an exciting human story in the Russian peasantry, which hardly any American writer had as yet bothered to record. The impact of the Revolution on the village, I said, must have shaken the peasantry more profoundly than any other group in Russia, and that with their natural gift for dramatic speech they themselves could tell the story of their experiences more movingly than any outsider. If he would help me go to Russia, I would write of them as I had written of the Doukhobors, letting them speak for themselves. The proposal appealed to Frank, and he commissioned me to write a series of articles.

Never for an instant had it occurred to me, nor I am sure to Frank, that this commission constituted an assignment in Utopia. I knew too much about old Russia and about modern farming, and I had read too much about the devastation of the World War, the

civil war, the famine, the Cheka terror, to delude myself into thinking that exalted slogans had overnight conjured forth, out of ruin and agony, a society of plenty and of universal brotherhood. In the preface to *Broken Earth,* in which I had expanded the material that had appeared in the *Century,* I wrote:

> "I went to Russia not to interview outstanding leaders of the Revolution . . . not to study theories and problems, not to hunt for atrocities . . . not to delve into the plans and plots of the Third International to wreck the established governments of the world . . . not to unearth a story, or *the* story of the backstage machinations of leaders and officials, men who are lusting for prestige, for grandeur, for power, intriguing against one another . . . I went to Russia with only one purpose in view—to hear the people talk. I use the word 'people' not in the English but in the Russian sense, meaning the dark masses—that is, the muzhik, the peasant."

I knew the peasant as he was in the old days, and Mount Brookville had given me new ears with which to hear his speech, and new eyes with which to see his home, his barns, his crops, his cows, his pigs, his dogs, his chickens, his tools and all else that made up the scheme of his everyday living. I knew also his old usages, his devotion to the Orthodox Church, his belief in the Evil One, his explosive temper, his love of talk and song and vodka and revelry, his abasement before superiors, his outward meekness and inward rebelliousness, his inordinate indulgence in lamentation and in self-reproach—above all, his consuming passion for land and his ancient conviction that, like an all-powerful spirit, land and only land could exorcise all his troubles and woes.

I knew, of course, that to hear the peasant speak I should need to wallow in village mud and to live the life I had lived as a boy, which was not at all like the life I had lived at Jim's. Nor would I mind it. I could do easily enough without johnnycake and strawberry shortcake and apple or raspberry pie. I should not mind sleeping in haystacks, as in the old days, and eating black bread and cucumbers, and neither the smell nor the dinginess of peasant households would dismay me. I would follow the trek back to the old home with as much excitement as I followed it from New York

to Mount Brookville, and with the same hope of discovering a whole new world, though it might be only in process of birth. I had no theories to verify, no slogans to uphold, no causes to espouse, no dreams to consummate, nor the least wish to behold or to experience any kind of Utopia in Russia or anywhere else. I would see life as it was and compare it with what I had known it to be, and not as leaders, dead or alive, with a gift for rhetoric had said that it was supposed to be. And always in the background would be my experience in Mount Brookville, with Jim's "higher learning" to help the appraisal of everything I might see and hear.

I knew that I should find enormous havoc and misery—the civil war and the terror of the Revolution had made that inevitable. I knew also that I should find enormous hope and creative energy.

## CHAPTER XXV

## *Birch Again*

FOR MONTHS I HAD WANDERED in the Tartar country, Great Russia, the Ukraine, the Volga region, the Kuban, and then I journeyed to the village of my birth. I had been away eighteen years—epochal, momentous years not only in my life but in the life of all mankind and especially in the life of Russia. Yet on first sight I found the village outwardly as wretched and primitive as it was on the day when I left it. The same log hovels and thatch roofs with the same black round chimneys, the same deep mud, the same enormous mudhole by our old house, the same surly dogs barking as savagely as ever and pouncing on strangers, venom in their eyes and teeth, the same open wells with the massive sweeps, the same tumbling fences, the same strutting pigs and chickens, and the same scene of squalor in the yards, with not a touch of greensward to lighten the ugliness. The fields too looked no different than in the old days, the same long, narrow strips with the eternal grass-grown ridges or dead furrows dividing them from one another, the same lumpy seed beds, the same thickly planted rows of cabbage in the gardens, the same gnarled and untrimmed fruit trees. As a boy I had regarded it all—the houses, the fields, the

squalor, the primitiveness—as natural as the bright skies in summer and the heavy snows in winter. Now, with Mount Brookville before my eyes, I sensed only too poignantly the sad backwardness of the village, the years and years of knowledge and experience that separated it from the American village in which I had grown to manhood.

The disappearance of the near-by forests only deepened my gloom, for now I saw endless rows of stumps where formerly the horizons were white and green with birch and ash and fir. The destruction had occurred during the early days of the Revolution, when there was no government in the district, and later when the Soviets were still too feeble to enforce discipline. Peasants pounced on the woods like famished armies on freshly discovered stores of food and literally devoured them. Day and night they chopped and sawed and skidded logs and drew home load after load, with no thought of the future, of the damage to the land and the rivers, of the preservation of wild life or of the communal need for cool retreats in hot weather. The river in the old village had shrunk beyond recognition; even the legendary "devil's hole" was ringed around with weeds and scum. In a neighboring village, not a yard but had been stacked roof high with timber. Then a fire broke out. The flames leaped from one thatch roof to another. In the absence of fire-fighting machinery, even a hand pump and a hose, the peasants were as helpless before the sweeping flames as a stand of corn is before a tornado, and not only the houses but the piles of timber were reduced to ashes. Then they wrung their hands in grief and wept over the folly they had committed in cutting down the forests, for now they needed to journey long distances for timber to rebuild their homes.

I am sure that even if there had been a Jim among them, or a score of Jims, no blasts of profanity could shame or frighten them into sparing those forests. Their age-old hunger for timber and their ancient lust for revenge against the *pomieshtshik* (landlord), even when he was a man whose kind deeds had earned him universal respect and admiration, could not be stilled by words, however wise or scorching, any more than a magician's incantations can still in spring the endless roar and crash of the ice floes in a river. The Polish landlord, for example, had always been held in high

esteem in all the neighboring villages. In his own village he had built a schoolhouse for the people. Whenever a man ran out of straw and hay for his cow and horse and went to him for help, he returned home with a load of fodder of some kind. Nor had he ever imposed severe or forbidding conditions, as did koolaks and other landlords. Often enough he donated fodder to a poor man. Whenever a muzhik lost his house in a fire and was too poor to pay for the timber for a new house, the landlord allowed him part or all of it at low cost, and sometimes at no cost whatever. In my boyhood days I had heard only words of praise for the good Polish *pan* (landlord). Peasants had wished that the German landlord had been "as human a master" as he was. Yet, as soon as the czarist government collapsed and muzhiks realized that no soldiers or gendarmes would protect landlords, they broke loose in mobs and swooped on the Polish landlord's properties and helped themselves to ropes, tools, harnesses, anything they could lay their hands on. With horse and plow they rushed to his lands and worked by daylight and in the dark, ripping up furrow after furrow of sod in the belief that the area they turned over would be theirs forever. They spared nothing, and nothing was sacred, not even the landlord's private chapel, an ornate little building set in a grove of fir, birch and oak. They knocked loose the bolts, the clamps, the springs and anything else that was made of metal, which was especially precious to them. When I walked inside the chapel it looked as though a hurricane had blown over the interior, so shattered were pulpit, gallery, windows, doors, ceiling, floor. The walls were stained with lewd inscriptions. Nor did this end the wanton assault. After the landlord died, his body was dragged out of the family vault, stripped of clothes and jewelry and nailed, naked and feet up, to two adjacent trees. Only when the Bolsheviks arrived did they bury the body. I saw the grave in the rear of the chapel, with nothing but stones and broken brick to mark its location.

The age-old hate against landlords, which throughout Russian history had exploded in formidable rebellions, now under Stenka Razin, now under Bolotnikov, now under Pugatchev, had gathered fresh strength and fresh frenzy with the overthrow of the Czar. Rightly or wrongly, the muzhiks blamed the landlords more than anyone else for the terrors and woes they had for centuries

endured, and now that the chance for retribution had presented itself, they tarried not a second to bring it to brutal fulfillment. I never knew peasants anywhere in Russia who by nature were more mild and peace-loving than our own old neighbors, yet they too joined in the savage crusade against landlords. The devastation was especially marked on the lands that had formerly been clothed with forest. It was heartbreaking to contemplate the acres and acres of former birch reduced to stumps that gleamed in the sun like tombstones in a graveyard. In the old days the very whiteness of the trees had lightened the dismalness of mud and poverty.

Yet, when I heard people speak, I realized that only outwardly had the village remained unchanged. Inwardly it was storming with new passions, new conflicts, new aspirations. Everyone was bursting with talk. Older people wailed that doom was upon them. The coming of the Reds after they had driven out the Poles had made it possible for them to keep a cow and a pig without danger of enemy soldiers stealing and killing either. But that was all the good the Revolution had brought them. The rich rewards that it had promised in the days of the civil war had remained hopelessly unfulfilled. They weren't even as well off materially as they had been under the Czar. Never had they known such shortages of manufactured goods in the old times, and never had they had to pay such outrageous prices for the few things that they could still buy. Nails were not to be had, wagon grease was scarce and so was kerosene, a pair of boots cost from twenty to forty poods of rye, a pood of salt ten poods of rye, whereas formerly, under the Czar, salt had cost one pood of rye and could be bought in unlimited quantities.

What further incensed them was the ban on *samogon* (home brew), which they felt they had to have for weddings, christenings, holidays and other festive occasions. They fumed with protest, and they did not care who heard them, and least of all were they impressed by young people who shouted at them that if they were not so dark-minded they would know that, after the destructiveness of the World War and of the civil war, the Soviets needed time to rebuild shattered industrial plants and to put up new ones before they could supply the population with all the

manufactured goods it demanded. Never in the old days had the village been so stirred by conflict or so vehement in its demands on government. Nor did the Soviets at that time interfere with this surly and boisterous talk.

One evening the young people invited me to go with them on *nochleg*. They would supply a horse and a sheepskin coat, and out there in the pasture, with no old people around to shout their heads off that the world was tumbling into ruin, they would enlighten me on the truth of everything.

The mention of *nochleg* roused old and stirring memories. In my boyhood days I had always loved to listen to the choral singing of the boys and girls who had gathered on their horses in the square outside our house. Young as I was, I had envied them the adventure of going off for the night to the far-away pasture where they sang and played games and told stories and shouted with glee and then, wrapping themselves in sheepskins or home-made hemp cloths, lay down for a short night of sound sleep. Of all the old institutions, none at the moment evoked more entrancing memories. I doubt that the boys and girls in Elder Jepson's class ever had known, at any of their socials, the exhilarations and ecstasies that *nochleg* always afforded the young people in the old village. At no other time and at no other place, not even at weddings, were they as carefree and jubilant. I was therefore only too glad to go along.

Hooded in a sheepskin coat, I rode on a neighbor's horse over a sludgy and moonlit road, and as I listened to the singing I lived over again old enchantments and not a few old miseries. War had swept over the village, a mighty revolution had crashed on it, older people were racked with bitterness, but youth sang with a zest that betrayed neither bitterness nor disappointment. It was good to hear this singing of conflict and triumph, of death and love.

On reaching the pasture, we dismounted from our horses, tethered their forefeet with little ropes so that they wouldn't stray into planted crops, and then gathered on a stretch of rolling land which was drier than the level of the pasture. Of course, in the light of my experience in Mount Brookville, exciting as it was as a

social diversion, *nochleg* was only too flagrantly a symptom of the backwardness and poverty of the village. Once I had suggested to Jim that it might do the horses good to turn them out for the night on the grass. He glared at me and roared out:

"And who in hell's told you fresh grass's ever done a work horse any good?"

"That's what we do in the old country," I replied apologetically.

"There hain't no decent farmer round here'd do such hurt to a horse when he's workin' hard in the field." He paused as always before offering an explanation of an indictment and then went on with vigor: "Fresh grass hain't never done a work horse any good. It makes him soft and sweats him a lot, and that don't help him pull a mowin' machine or a load of hay. There hain't nothin' better for a work horse than good dry timothy and oats."

But oats were scarce in the old village, and the hay that lay in the barns or was stacked in the meadows was needed for the long winter months ahead, and therefore, no matter how hard horses might work, all summer and until late autumn they were ridden to the communal pasture to graze all night.

I plied the young people with questions, and their answers only testified further to the vast inner commotion that the Revolution had whipped up in them. They no longer believed in the Evil One nor in the *rusalka*—it was all a fraud to scare muzhiks into submission to landlords and officials. . . . Few of the boys attended church services, and more and more of the girls were ceasing to attend them, though they still insisted on a church wedding and on christening their children. . . . If a girl reached the age of twenty-one or -two and was unmarried, she was regarded as an old maid, and she and her parents worried about her future as much as they ever did in the old days. . . . Dowries were still prevalent, and because so many young men had been killed in the war against Poland and Germany and against the Whites, bridegrooms sometimes demanded of a girl's father a horse and wagon or two and three hundred poods of rye or as many gold roubles—nothing the village needed so much as to smash this ancient form of exploitation, which was an especial burden on the poor—perhaps the new education that people were receiving would soon end this

dishonorable practice, even as it had already ended belief in the Evil One and the *rusalka*. . . . Nor did muzhiks need any longer to lift their hats before anybody—gone were the constable, the town clerk, the landlord and the others to whom muzhiks formerly made obeisance—now the lowliest and most unlettered muzhik was as good as the chairman of the Soviet and could speak to any official in the *volost* (township) as to an equal. . . . If some of them persisted in the old practices, it was because the old ideology had not yet been shaken out of them, but in time it would be, for the one thing that the Revolution was seeking was to batter out of all muzhiks the notion that they were inferior to others—indeed muzhiks could now go to the Gymnasium as freely as anybody, and to the university and to all the military schools, and could become doctors, engineers, judges, officers in the army or commissaries in the government. . . . Yet nothing the village needed so much as new *technika* (machines)—if only they could bring to their lands American *technika*—tractors, mowing machines, grain drills, thrashers and all other modern implements and electricity, too, and everything else that would help them to modernize their methods of tillage and their manner of living—then they could raise crops that no landlord had ever dreamed of, and the old people would cease to grumble and to shout that the world was tumbling on their heads. . . . *Technika*—what a glorious boon to man and how desperately they needed it all—the best that there was in the world, especially in America!

The language these young people spoke was new in those ancient and far-stretching lowlands. The Revolution had hurled on them an avalanche of fresh concepts which demolished old beliefs and implanted new aspirations. They had acquired the vocabulary not only of a new social gospel but of the machine age, of the very peaks of its achievements, and with all their hearts they were yearning for its speedy advent. Little did they realize, at the time, the cost that the country would someday be obliged to pay in substance and in blood for the enthronement of the machine in their village and in the scores of thousands of villages all over the land. Yet they knew that without it there could be no fulfillment of the vast promises of the Revolution and no redemption from the mud, the squalor, the houseflies, the poverty. Indeed, there could be

only stagnation and collapse. Clearly, unlike their fathers and mothers, they knew that the problems and the tasks that they were facing were matters, not of words and slogans only, but of iron, steel, of tractors, mowing machines, disk harrows, of new ways of working their lands, and of unending toil! Exciting and enlightening was this tempestuous talk!

How sadly the peasants needed this new *technika* and "the hang of things" in general became impressively evident to me when I walked out into the fields. Harvest was in full swing. Rye had already been cut, and now hundreds of men and women, nearly all barefooted, were stooping with sickles over the ripened barley and oats. At Jim's and at Heinrich's in Mount Brookville I was often sent to a grain field to cut by hand a passageway for the horses or the corners, which the binder could not reach. But I always used a cradle. Standing in an upright position, I could with one sweep cut down an enormous swath of grain. Here the use of sickles not only made the work more arduous, but every stroke seemed a nibble compared to the swath that the cradle slashed every time I swung it around. Yet neither the peasants nor the landlords in the region had yet discovered its existence. More pathetic was their method of curing grain. They stacked it in layers, with the top capped by a sheaf that was spread out like an umbrella so as to provide easy drainage.

"You're still setting up sheaves in the old way," I said to one man.

"It's the only way we know," he answered.

"I'll show you a new way," I said.

"Please, please," he entreated while his wife and two daughters, sickle in hand, stood up and listened eagerly.

"Very well," I said, and I began setting up sheaves in pairs with the butt ends outward and apart from one another and the heads pressed together.

"See," I said, "how easy it is and how quickly sun and wind can dry the sheaves so that you can draw them into the barn before rain comes."

Other peasants came over to see what I was doing, and one girl in a near-by field proceeded, amidst gay laughter, to set up sheaves

as I had done. But her father shouted to her to stop. He wasn't going to spoil his grain setting it up in a way of which he never had heard. No amount of arguing could persuade him or any of the others to try the Mount Brookville method of curing grain. They would take no chances with a new way lest it prove a failure and they lose their grain. They would rather follow the ancient method, with its colossal waste of labor and the greater gamble with the weather that it involved. Nothing that I had seen in the village demonstrated so emphatically what a prodigious task the Revolution was facing, not only in building new factories for the manufacture of machines with which to cultivate land in a modern way, but of breaking the muzhik from his wasteful and lumbering habits of work and teaching or imposing on him "the hang of things" of the machine age. Clearly, coaxing and persuasion would need to be supplemented by no small amount of compulsion.

Peter the Sword came to see me. He was the husband of Adarya, Mother's best friend when we lived in the village, and the father of Sergey, my boyhood chum, who during the World War was killed in France. Peter brought me a handful of pears, and when he gave them to me I saw that his hands trembled. Eighteen years had wrought a pathetic change in his appearance. His thick black beard, which grew only about the chin, leaving his cheeks as smooth as a child's, was barely streaked with gray. Nor had he lost any of the hair on his head, and he still wore it long, letting it fall like a mat over his neck. But his face was thin and shriveled, and his eyes shone not with the old-time vigor and energy but with weariness and despair. He asked about Mother and the others in our family, and then, dolefully shaking his head, proceeded to unburden himself of his sorrows. His health was bad, and he couldn't work hard any more, and his daughter-in-law and her new husband were endlessly grumbling and insulting him and begrudging him the bread he ate.

"With my sweat and blood, my dearest," he wailed, "I drenched every span of my lands. Did I know what night was in the old days? Did I know rest at all? Always I toiled and toiled, and so did my unfortunate Adarya, and now I, Peter the Sword—think of it!—am driven from my own house and off my own lands

by people who are strangers to me, and only because my hands tremble so, see? And I can no longer swing a scythe as I used to or steer a pair of horses, either. Oh, Lord, why am I living? It were far better if I died and joined my wife and my son, far better to rot in the earth than to listen to the insults and the curses of my nasty daughter-in-law and her nasty husband. . . . Ah, little son, tell your mother of the evil fate that has befallen Peter the Sword, the husband of Adarya." He broke down and cried like a child.

How unlike the people in Mount Brookville he was!—unlike Abner, for example, who in his moment of affliction had steeled himself into absolute silence. But then a tragedy like Peter's would have been impossible in Mount Brookville, for there, if a man had a deed to his land, he was master of it until the end of his days. Old and decrepit as he might be, if his farm was worked, whether by a son-in-law or a stranger, he was entitled to his share of the harvest. But since days immemorial in our old village, as in thousands of others all over Russia, when men or women got so old that they could contribute little or nothing to the work on the land, their children or in-laws treated them often enough with contempt and stinted them the bread they ate. Ownership of the land did not count, nor did lifelong efforts to maintain or build up its fertility. The rights of labor superseded the rights of ownership.

I called on the parish priest, who lived in a village less than two miles away. I knew him in the old days and remembered only too well his smiling face and that whenever I passed his house and he saw me he would come out of the gateway with a handful of pears or apples. I mounted the spacious steps of his porch and pulled the bell. There was no reply. I pulled it again and again with increasing vigor. Then slowly the door opened and an old man timidly stuck out his head. I hardly recognized the once rugged and cheerful Little Father, and I can do no better than to reprint the account of my visit as I wrote it at that time:

"Shrunken and bony, with his long hair sparse and matted and hanging over his back like a dirty rag, with his face thin and brittle, as though the skin were frozen or dried up and on the

point of cracking, and with a loose linen smock falling over his boots below the knees and accentuating the pallor of his features and the frailty of his body, he seemed a mere skeleton of his former self. Even his teeth were gone, and his gums were black, as though lacerated by disease. Except for his eyes, which had retained some of their ancient sparkle, he seemed drained of vitality and void of a sense of self-importance, even of self-confidence. As I saw him now, decrepit and crestfallen, he seemed a mere memory of the stalwart and joyous-hearted Little Father that I had known in my boyhood days.

"He did not recognize me and stared at me with apprehension, as though I were a messenger of sad tidings. He held the door half closed, as if hesitating to admit me. I introduced myself, mentioning my father's name, and instantly he threw the door open and welcomed me. He had mistaken me, he said, for someone he was loath to meet—a Soviet official with information as to whether or not he could remain in his house. He had received an order to vacate it, but had appealed to a higher power, and was daily expecting a reply to the appeal.

" 'Thank God,' he remarked with a sense of relief, 'it is not he. . . . My heart was pounding so wildly as I stood at the door facing you that I thought I'd collapse.' He fell into a seat and put both hands over his heart, as though to calm it. 'But there is no telling—the day is long yet, and the night still longer, anything may happen. It is not like in the old days, when months and years passed and all remained the same. Nowadays much may happen in one day, aye in one hour. But ah, tell me something of yourself, your mother, your brothers and sisters—what a long time you have been away, a very, very long time!'

"We were in the dining room, and it was bare now, with few pieces of furniture and still fewer furnishings. The floor was unwashed and crusted over with bits of mud. The paint on the walls was peeling, and in the corner, right over the ikons, a spider was weaving a web. As if in answer to the multitude of queries that came to me, he hastened to explain: 'You see how changed everything is! We have not a single servant any more, cannot afford one, and besides, it is dangerous; they would call us exploiters and parasites and would surely put us out of the house, and the

*matushka* [Little Mother]—well, she is getting too old to do hard work, and so we let things slip.' Eyeing me searchingly, he continued, 'You have not been here long? Ah! So you know little yet'—and, leaning close as though to confide a secret, he remarked, 'It is better to have things neglected—windows unwashed, floor unscrubbed, even hair uncombed—they'll respect you more if you look wretched. . . . That's the truth,' and he laughed bitterly.

"His wife came in, and I gasped when I saw how she had faded. Her eyelids had contracted so that her once pretty eyes were barely open, and her face was crisscrossed with deep lines. Bareheaded and barefooted, and puffing at a fat cigarette rolled peasant-fashion in coarse wrapping paper, she made a sorrowful picture. Only when she spoke did she seem like her old self, alert and animated. After greeting me with a burst of endearments, she rushed off, and soon returned with a sizzling samovar which she set on the table. The Little Father invited me to come to the table, and as he was pouring tea he kept up a flow of melancholy chatter. . . .

" 'It is well that you have come back, very well, and now you can see with your own eyes what is happening here—the world turned upside down. . . . We have lost everything—see how bare this room is. . . . The whole house is like that—we have sold everything for food, for bread; we had to. . . . And the orchard, dear, that too, is gone now, nationalized, and we are not supposed to get one wormy apple. The watchman is a good man, a Jew—every morning when he picks the fruit off the ground he brings us in a hatful. . . . We have no tea. We have not had any in a long time—we use dried apples instead, soak them in hot water . . . please excuse such tea . . . an inventive people, aren't we?' He looked up with the hurt expression of a boy who is on the point of committing an indiscretion.

" 'We have no sugar, either—please do excuse us—we just haven't got it Imagine, little son—a *batushka* [Little Father] without sugar!'

"It was hard to imagine a Russian priest without all the sugar he ever would want for tea and for all other purposes. He surveyed the table with his eyes, and on espying a little paper box

in the folds of a coarse towel that covered a loaf of black bread, he reached for it and opened it. 'But ah—things are not so very bad, here is something, our daughter has sent it with her boy who came yesterday for a visit here.' He thrust a little white pill into my glass. 'It is very sweet, sweeter than sugar—saccharine, but sh-sh!—not a word to anyone, little son; it is forbidden to have saccharine. . . .'

"'Eat the bread,' pleaded the *matushka,* 'black bread; it is the only kind we have now—and thank God for that. And here, take an apple, it tastes good with bread. . . .'

"'You should have come to us in former times,' the *batushka* resumed. 'Then we could have entertained you fittingly, Russian fashion, with a broad heart. . . .'

"'Aye, indeed, we could,' the *matushka* chimed in with enthusiasm, as though happy at the mere recollection of better days. 'Then we had sugar, tea, jams, meats, closets bursting with food, and all from our own estate—everything our own. . . .

"'And now nothing,' he continued—'black bread, apples, hot water and saccharine as long as it will last, which will be only a few days. . . . *Ekh, Bozhe moy* [Dear God], if only they would not try to put us out of the house!'

"'Then we might as well dig our graves——' said the Little Mother.

"'Surely,' I ventured, 'some peasant will offer you shelter?'

"'Perhaps—I hope so—I have done them no evil. I have always been kind to them. But the peasants have changed'

"'Indeed they have, they are not as hospitable as they once were. . . .'

"'Not as interested, either . . . Imagine it, when my land was taken, not a man mumbled a word in protest; when my orchard was confiscated, again they were silent; and now that I am being driven from my house, nobody bothers to help me. I might as well have been a stranger instead of a lifelong neighbor and the priest of this parish. . . . Oh, you don't know what a revolution does to people. . . .'

"'You have had no Revolution in America—a Soviet Revolution?'

"'No.'

"'Then you cannot imagine how people can change.'

"'*Nu,*' mumbled the *batushka,* 'let us not grumble too much—it is God's will. He gives and He takes. He blesses and He punishes, so let it be. . . .'

"While on my way over, I had formulated an endless series of questions to put to him. But now, when I saw him in his neglected house stripped of the once luxurious furnishings, and himself so decrepit, so humbled, so subdued, and his wife, once so comely and jovial, now so withered and resigned, I lost all desire for serious discussion. What else but sorrow could they speak of? No words they might utter could convey the wretchedness of their plight as eloquently as did the mere sight of them in their now barren and neglected home, from which they might at any hour be driven. . . ."

The Little Father had never been an Elder Jepson. Perhaps it was not his fault. After all, he was a graduate of a theological seminary and lived in a large house with a spacious porch, in as much comfort as the landlord. The disparity in cultural status and in economic well-being had created a gulf between him and his parishioners that no amount of good will and sociability could easily bridge. Therefore, though living among them and ministering to their religious needs, the Little Father, unlike Elder Jepson, never had become a part of the mass. He never went to peasant gatherings and never participated in their gossip and in their stories of the Evil One and the *rusalka.* Nor could I imagine him joining a crowd of young people in a bobsled or a hayrack, as did Elder Jepson, and going with them for an evening of play and diversion to some farmer's home. I had never heard of him putting on "literary programs" or a mock trial of a breach-of-promise case for the amusement of parishioners and the community. Such ministrations were beneath his dignity and beyond his calling, and now that the Revolution had dealt him a staggering blow he was as alone as though he never had had, or known, any neighbors!

Seven years later I went back to the old village. It was my third visit since the Revolution, and hardly had I reached the outlying fields when I became dramatically aware of an epochal change in

the very lay of the land. Gone were the long individual strips with the grass-grown ridges and the dead furrows. Instead, on one side of the road and for an enormous distance there stretched before my eyes a vast unified acreage, as on one of the large wheat farms in Canada or America. Emphatically the collective had laid its mighty hand on these fields.

Not all peasants had joined, for on the other side of the road strips still remained as long and narrow as ever. But enough of them had yielded to the new command and made the collective a stupendous reality, like the conquest of a fresh territory by an invading army, only that this conquest outwardly showed no scars of battle and no marks of devastation. On the contrary, the billowing stand of grain testified to an abundant harvest.

The closer I drew to the village the more stirringly I was aware of the fresh conquest of the Revolution. Huge buildings were in process of erection—cow stables, horse barns, pigsties, with high walls, large windows and ample space inside for each animal. Not even the Polish landlord had ever built such well-lighted and spacious barns for livestock. The tractor had also roared its way here and brought with it the gangplow, the disk harrow, the grain drill, the binder, the thrashing machine, and of course the new science of agriculture. On my previous visits at *nochleg* and at other places the young people were only dreaming of the new *techniķa*. Now it had already sunk its gleaming steel into the soil. The age of wood, which for hundreds of years had held the village in thrall, was going the way of the landlords and of the civilization that they had built. A fresh energy and a fresh hardness not only of tools but of soul was sweeping the countryside.

There was other evidence of the onward march of the Revolution. Within full view of our house, on the edge of the former wood, stood a new and imposing building with a porch and large windows. It was the schoolhouse, the first the village had had in all its history. As it was summer, the pupils were on vacation, but not the teachers. They were conducting a nursery—likewise the first the village had known. There was room for only the poorest children. Even so, distrust was rampant, and some mothers and fathers hoped for the collapse of the nursery, while others not so decisive in their opposition chose to wait and see what would

happen. The ancient and deep-rooted suspicion of new ideas and new usages, so mighty a rampart of the old civilization, which had driven the Revolution in time of stress to increasing militancy and increasing cruelties and had led to the catastrophes that accompanied the early days of collectivization, had manifested itself even in the attitude toward nurseries. There can be no more excruciating experience for any people than to be reborn when they are already grown up!

Our old house had been converted into a fire station; the equipment was modest enough—a long rubber hose, a shiny hand pump, several ladders and half a dozen barrels of water kept on two wheel carts; no engines, and none of the other mechanized equipment of a modern community. Even so, it was a vast advance on the pails and axes with which, with rare exceptions, muzhiks had for ages been fighting "the red cock," which in time of strong winds leaped wildly from one thatch roof to another until houses and barns, and now and then livestock, burned to charcoal and ashes.

The Revolution then was no longer a formula, a promise, but a process of historical transformation, which neither the curses nor the wails of older people, who loathed the new order because it compelled the scrapping of old habits and old conveniences, could halt. Thus the collective, with its large areas of unified lands, its school, its nursery, its fire station, its community radio, which functioned only when the mechanic was at hand, was the foundation of a new society that was to rise in place of the old. One by one, old institutions were crumbling, even those like holiday rituals and wedding ceremonies, which to me had always testified to the peasant's great gifts of imagination and of dramatic expression.

In parts of Russia, principally in the Kuban and in the Ukraine, the reckless generalship of the early years of collectivization had led to endless misfortunes that finally culminated in the famine of 1932–33. There was no famine in my old village, for there the sabotage was less strenuous than in the above-mentioned regions. Yet even there the slaughter of livestock had aggravated enormously the material condition of the people, and the air crackled with

oaths, wails, denunciations. But no one starved. On the contrary, people from other regions came there to buy bread, potatoes and cucumbers.

I do not intend here to make a survey of collectivization. That is a subject for a separate book. Yet I must emphasize that by the summer of 1934, though still irked by the new discipline, multitudes of recalcitrant peasants no longer doubted the superiority of large-scale mechanized farming over the former strip system of primitive tillage. At present, in spite of its enormous cost in substance and in human and animal life, collectivization in my judgment constitutes the most triumphant achievement of the Revolution. Not that dissatisfaction has disappeared. The stupidity, incompetence, the sheer villainy of the bureaucracy have been a prolific cause of mishap and often enough of horror. It will take no little time to develop able leadership for the more than one quarter of a million collectives in the land. Yet even now they are so firmly intrenched that they have become an organic part not only of the new and still enormously crude civilization of the country but of its physical integration and of its fortification against alien attack. No feud of leaders, however violent, and no blood purge, however gruesome, and no war, whether civil or international, however lengthy or disastrous, can uproot them. Any effort, whether by native ruler or foreign conqueror, to pluck them out of existence would in my judgment loosen a flood of blood the like of which even Russia has never witnessed. The murderous battling over every span of good land and bad land, over tractors and other implements, over every nail, every bolt, every pig, every chicken on the collectives, would outrival the worst horrors of the civil war, or of any civil war ever recorded in history. Nor could such an effort succeed. I firmly believe that the collectives are the Magna Charta and the Bill of Rights of the new order in the Russian village. Their far-flung plans to bring water on the land, especially from the lakes, marshes and rivers of the north, to sow grass and plant trees on exhausted and desert plains, to carry wheat farther and farther north and potatoes farther and farther south, to bring grain and vegetables to the antarctic regions, to acclimate to the Russian lands a multitude of new crops which it had never grown—these, together with the strenuous and far-flung battles to use only select

seeds of everything that is planted and to breed only select cows, pigs, goats, sheep, chickens, are the most formidable guarantee Russia has as yet evolved against the recurrence of the periodic famines that for over a thousand years had been devastating the peasantry in many regions.

Little Father Timofey and his wife were spared the agony and the degradation that the new order in the village was sure to visit on them. They died before collectivization had begun to encroach on the countryside. Now a huge red flag floated over their house, which was no longer a parsonage but the office and the clubhouse of the village collective.

Old Peter the Sword had found life in the home that he had built so intolerable that he fled to a far-away village and joined a collective. Had he remained in his old house, the new statute governing collectives would have protected him against the abuses of his daughter-in-law and her husband. If he could still work, herd cows, feed pigs, guard the granaries, he could earn his own bread and potato and vegetables, and neither his daughter-in-law nor her husband would be permitted to dishonor him as they had been doing when the village was on a basis of individual farming. And if he were incapacitated for labor, the 2 per cent of gross income which collectives are required to set aside for social purposes would have obligated the community to care for him and for others like him. Not the least salutary feature of the stabilized collectives is the provision for the care of the aged, the disabled, the orphaned, who in the old days were often subject to cruel maltreatment by their own kin.

A visit to the village store was enlightening. Seen with the eyes I had acquired in Mount Brookville, it was no store at all. The floor was spattered with mud and had not been swept in days. The windows were thick with dust and seemed never to have been wiped. Even the chimney in the overhanging lamp was darkened with smoke. The shelves were mostly empty. There was no sugar, no candy, little hardware, not enough nails, hardly any textiles. There was plenty of kerosene, salt and a moderate amount of soap. Nor was the young attendant an obliging servant of the people.

Had a man like him been a clerk in Fred's store in Mount Brookville he wouldn't have lasted an hour. His unwashed hands and clumsy manner and his rudeness to customers would have provoked Fred into swinging the door wide open and shouting "Get the hell out of here, you damned galoot."

Yet it wasn't the young man's fault that he was unfit for the task to which he was assigned. He had come straight from the plow. He never had worked in a store, never had been trained by anybody in service, never had learned that the first requisite of salesmanship was courtesy to customers. There were no men with trading experience in the village, and since somebody had to fill the job, the local authorities selected a politically minded young man. His incompetence was symptomatic of one of the colossal difficulties of the Revolution and of one of its immense tragedies—lack of qualified personnel to carry on properly the work of the country.

Yet, viewed with my old eyes, the little co-operative shop was a revelation. There were cosmetics on the shelves, lipstick, perfume, tonics—and I was amazed at the eagerness with which girls were buying it all. They had become so city conscious that they wanted everything they could lay their hands on, if only it came from the factory. The use of lipstick and rouge on their naturally ruddy cheeks and lips seemed a joke, perhaps an outrage. Yet they giggled endlessly as they examined the pretty little boxes and the flasks that they bought, for to them cosmetics was not only a new experience but an exciting adventure, which immeasurably enhanced their self-esteem.

Equally enlightening were the requests of customers. They asked for sugar, for factory-made shoes and stockings, for handkerchiefs, for lamps, for decorating paper, for candy, for cheap jewelry, for collars and ties, for city-made suits of clothes. Usually the clerk had only one answer to all requests: "Out of stock."

Thereupon there would be prolonged arguments.

"Why are you out of stock?"

"Because the district co-operative hasn't sent anything."

"When will you get fresh supplies of goods?"

"I don't know."

"Why don't you know—what in damnation kind of a shopkeeper are you if you don't know?"

"I don't know, d'you hear? And besides, you forget it is only the third year of the Five-Year Plan, and the government and the Party are still only building factories, and when you build factories you get nothing from them. Wait until the factories are finished."

"When will they be finished?"

"How can I tell? Am I an engineer?"

"Suppose I die before they are finished?"

"When a man is dead he needs no goods, not even salt."

"We'll all be dead by the time the factories are finished."

"You wretched counter-revolutionaries—how dare you talk like that!"

"How else shall we talk when the shelves are as empty as they are and when the best you can do is promise us goods after we are dead?"

"Well, there will be plenty of us alive—and the Revolution is interested only in those who are alive."

Endless were the altercations, and peasants seemed to have no feeling of restraint in expressing disappointment or in hurling denunciation on the clerk and on all co-operatives.

Underwear had at last come to the village. The first shipment consisted of one pair of drawers, and the whole village turned out to buy them. They lined up in a queue, and loud and mordant was the protest when the announcement of the amount of the shipment was made. A woman was at the head of the queue, and she bought the much-advertised garment. On arriving home she tried it on and did not like it, so she ripped it apart and made herself a blouse. Subsequent shipments consisted of complete outfits, and no sooner did they arrive, always in small allotments, than they were grabbed by goods-hungry muzhiks.

Since it was only the third year of the first Five-Year Plan, the shortage of goods was so acute that peasants everywhere shouted themselves hoarse with protest. Yet on Sunday afternoon, when the young people gathered in the street for a dance, I gasped with amazement. Not one boy or girl was barefooted. Not one in the ancient *lapti*. They all wore leather shoes. The girls sported factory-made cotton stockings and brightly colored kerchiefs, and there was hardly one who did not flaunt a handkerchief, which still

seemed more an article of ornament than of utility, for most of them wore it as did a bride in the old days—wrapped round their hands. The machine age and the violent propaganda of the Revolution had implanted in the minds of young people, not only new political concepts, but new wants of which in the old days they had never heard.

The little straw-filled cart in which I was driving back to town shook and rattled violently as the horse clumped his way over the narrow and rutty dirt road. I sat in the rear, with my face to the village, watching trees, houses, barns recede from view. I was leaving it once more, not to return for a long time, if ever, and more than during any previous visit I was overwhelmed with the immensity of the cataclysm that had swept over it in the years since I first left it. Gone was the Little Father whom the muzhiks had once worshiped. Gone were the beggars, except in the bazaars—collectivization had ended their migrations—with their ancient lyres and their stirring ballads. Gone were men like Blind Sergey and old Ahay, and never again will the village know their like. Gone were the Evil One and the *rusalka* and the fears and adventures and hair-raising tales that they had inspired. Gone was much of the old darkness and no little of the old romance.

I passed a large cabbage field. The rows were marked both ways, and the plants were set in squares. Obviously it belonged to the collective, and this was the first time I had ever known the village to plant cabbage precisely as Jim had taught me to plant it. If Jim had been with me on the journey, I am sure he would have muttered approvingly: "I guess them peasants of yourn are gettin' the hang of things with cabbage, anyway."

They are getting more, though—infinitely more. In spite of the blood and tyranny of the Revolution they are getting "the hang of things" with cows, pigs, horses, tractors, gangplows, mowing machines, binders, thrashers, combines, and a whole array of mechanized agricultural equipment of which they never had dreamed. They have been introduced to newspapers, books, lectures and to other social and intellectual diversions which they never had known, for while in other parts of Russia the former zemstvos had valiantly struggled to bring to the countryside the

fruits of modern civilization, no zemstvo ever had functioned in the part of the Russian world in which I was born.

Of course the mud is still there, as deep and sticky as when I had waded in it in my boyhood days. The dogs are as sullen as in former times, and the houses are as wretched, with not a vestige of modern conveniences. But children in the schoolhouse know what a toothbrush is, and in the nursery, though not as yet in the home, they are being accustomed to the individual towel and the individual plate. A woman in childbirth no longer has her umbilical cord cut with a kitchen knife, as did my mother. A competent midwife performs the operation with a competent instrument and in a modern way. The young people who have been in the army or have attended special courses of study in the town are dreaming of the time when cobbles and perhaps asphalt will replace the mud and when the modern cottage with large windows and a shingled or tiled roof will supersede the thatch hovel. They are envisaging a new village with many of the social and cultural advantages of the town, with a park, a playground, an auditorium for motion pictures, dances, theatrical performances. They only wonder if war will intervene to thwart the fulfillment of their plans. Meanwhile they are assiduously preparing the men and the women, the boys and the girls, to fight off a possible onslaught of a foreign enemy.

Of course dissatisfaction is still rampant. The very immensity and newness of the task has proven too much of a strain on the competence and the temper of both people and leaders. Both now and then commit blunders that shatter harmony and good will and bring on catastrophe. That is the price they have to pay for arriving so late on the scene of the modern world and for the efforts of the Revolution—at first in the face of their fierce hostility, and even now not always with their consent, to pack generations of progress into a short span of time.

And so in Moscow, in their battle for power, leaders may conspire and degrade and execute one another, but in the old village the drive for "the hang of things" with the new machine and the new way of life never ceases.

CHAPTER XXVI

## *Pine Again*

WHENEVER I JOURNEYED to the old village, I anticipated a stormy experience. Whenever I journeyed to Mount Brookville, I anticipated forgetfulness of all stormy experiences. Having grown instead of raced into the machine age, Mount Brookville has never been overwhelmed by its wonders or harassed by its perplexities. No one there was ever stirred to excitement on sight of a hay tedder kicking up wet grass as I was or as would be any of my boyhood chums from the old village. Likewise, since it was born to democratic usage in government and in social life, Mount Brookville never accumulated a fund of violent emotion which at a critical moment could be easily jolted into an explosion. Never rich and never destitute, though always short of cash, it has never given itself to stern heart searching or to impassioned preoccupation with ultimate destiny, its own or that of the world, and never has it known the torments of either. Unlike the old village, Mount Brookville came into life an infant and on the attainment of physical maturity was not called upon to be reborn in mind and soul, in the very use of its muscles and bones.

Its serenity and abundance would astound the young people who are now at the helm of power in the old village. Of course they have heard of America, and they know that American *technika* has saved the Revolution from collapse. Neither the tractors nor the binders nor the combines would have roared over the Russian steppes had it not been for the attainments of American *technika,* and then collectivization would have remained a paper scheme and a chimera.

Once when I demonstrated to a group of youths the Mount Brookville way of milking cows, a Young Communist in a burst of rapture exclaimed, "Confound these Americans, how clever they are!" Yet he swore vehemently that America was rapidly heading toward a proletarian revolution. He thrilled to American *technika,* but he was dismally ignorant of Mount Brookville, and neither he

nor Stalin nor any of the other spokesmen of the Revolution, have as yet bothered to inform themselves of its real condition and its real spirit. That's why they cannot bear to hear of triumph in Mount Brookville just as so many New York radicals, with their burden of Utopian disillusionment, can no longer bear to hear of triumph and promise in the old village. In both instances political passion has choked the very desire for objective judgment.

In the summer of 1931, while crossing a dried-up tributary of the Volga, I came upon a procession of peasants, men and women, with heavy sacks and wooden baskets on their backs and shoulders and flanked by soldiers with rifles and mounted bayonets.

"Who are these people?" I asked one of the soldiers.

"Koolaks," he answered gruffly.

"Unfortunate human beings," cried a ponderous woman holding a heavy basket on her shoulder. She stopped, and started talking, but the soldier quickly intervened.

"Come on," he said, "this is no time for conversation. We are late as it is."

The procession moved on and on, with several peasant carts, loaded with more sacks and boxes, lumbering slowly behind. These men and women were on their way to the railroad station, where they were to board a train and start for exile in a far-away region.

For a long time I stood and watched them as they receded into the distance. They carried with them the burden not only of a great agony but of an age-old reality that the Revolution had come to smash—the reality of private property. In the war on the institution it had decreed the forcible liquidation of its chief beneficiaries in the village, and like all war decrees this one was carried out with no concession to the needs and the feelings of the victims. Many of the koolaks died prematurely in exile. Many others are still building highways, railroads, canals and other state projects. More and more of them have been retrieved to citizenship and are returning home.

Yet the ordeal to which they were subjected in the early days of their liquidation was one of the momentous tragedies of all time. Ever since then, whenever I have gone to Mount Brookville I have been reinforced in my conviction that a similar decree would

be impossible of fulfillment in that pine-bordered American village. Acquaintance with the machine and with democratic usage, in spite of all the abuses to which it has been subject, the very presence in its midst of a clergyman like Elder Jepson, have given its people a sturdiness of spirit which the muzhik, with his heritage of three centuries of serfdom, and his old and woeful agricultural incompetence, never had acquired. Were any effort made to liquidate a man like Jim, few of the liquidators would escape with their lives, even if Jim had to sacrifice his own. Friendly and peace-loving as are the people in Mount Brookville, they would not hesitate to take life or to give their own if a forcible effort were made to deprive them of their lands, their horses, their cows, their other possessions, or to deny any group of them rights which they have come to regard as much a part of their daily existence as the air they breathe. If ever they embark on a scheme of socialized agriculture, they will do so in a manner that suits their temper and their condition and in which the element of compulsion will have no place.

Yet because of the very individualism that is so sturdy a part of its folkways, Mount Brookville has known personal tragedies which would be impossible in the old village, especially now, with collectivization building up a fresh and many-sided social cohesiveness. Here, for example, is Fritz Friedhof, Heinrich's "smart" brother. Except for Heinz, who still lives in the city, Fritz is the only one of the Friedhofs who has survived. He has saved his money and has put it in the bank and in well-secured farm mortgages. He never married, and the older he grew the more aloof he kept from neighbors. Now he lives all alone on his older brother's farm in an old house on a high hill on the edge of a wood. "He won't let nobody come into the house," warned an old friend when I told him that I wished to call on Fritz. The warning seemed incredible. During the year that I worked for Heinrich, Fritz often came for dinner on Sundays, and after Nell Lonebeck died and I did the cooking, he taught me how to prepare German dishes, and he never left without helping Heinrich and me wash the dishes that had accumulated during the week in the washtub. He loved to speak German to me, and if I slipped up on words

and phrases, he was quick to point out my errors. Always serious-minded and not given to frivolities, never known to have been interested in a woman, he was in his family circle as sociable as Heinrich, his mother or any of his other brothers. I had not seen him in the years since I left Heinrich's farm.

On my way to his place I called on Lint Babcock.

"Fritz," said Lint, "won't let anyone come into his house. He just sits in his rockin' chair by the woodshed window and sleeps."

"Does he come to the village?" I asked.

"Yes, he comes to buy groceries, but he doesn't talk much to people and, good a farmer as he once was, he lets nearly all his land go to waste. He's got a cow in the pasture, and the other day I saw her with a newborn calf. I went up and told him about it, but he won't bring the cow home and milk her. He lets her and the calf run loose in the pasture. The calf's gotten so wild nobody can get near her."

"Is he out of his head?" I asked.

"I don't think that. He just likes being alone," and when I started for the road, Lint added:

"Look out for his dog—she's liable to bite you."

That a Friedhof or anyone else in Mount Brookville should have a dog that was liable to bite was in itself a tragic commentary on Fritz and his manner of living.

I ascended the hill, and on entering the woodshed I saw a white-faced dog curled up on a pile of wood. She never stirred from her place, not even when I started for the door. She seemed content enough to be left undisturbed. I stepped over to the door, and through a near-by window I saw a bald-headed man sitting in a rocker with his head bobbing up and down, apparently asleep. I knocked several times, and presently I heard the turning of a key inside.

"Hello, Fritz!" I said.

"Hello, Maurice, I hain't seen you in years."

I spoke German, but he answered in English. Now that he had grown stout, with folds of flesh on his cheeks and chin and neck, he resembled Heinrich more than any of his other brothers. The dog instantly rose and silently moved close to me.

"Will she bite?" I asked.

"She's liable to," he answered and made no effort to call her off.

"Shame on you, Fritz," I said, "to have a dog that 'll bite."

He didn't answer, and having been forewarned by Lint, I had cut myself a cane on my way to the house and held it in readiness to strike if the dog moved too close.

Instead of inviting me to the house, he led me out onto the lawn.

"You aren't farming much, are you?" I said.

"No."

"What do you do?"

"Nothin'."

He asked no questions and stood there in rubber boots, with his hands inside his overalls, squinting at the rolling fields ahead.

"Are you well?" I asked.

"Sure."

"You don't like people coming to see you?"

He made no answer.

It was evident that he didn't welcome the intrusion and bidding him an *auf Wiedersehen,* I left.

"Someday," said one of his neighbors whom I passed on the road, "I'll be passin' by his house and takin' a look in the window, and Fritz 'll be dead in his rockin' chair, and like as not he'll have been dead several days 'fore I find it out."

Even in the old days, such utter isolation was impossible in the old village.

Late in the summer of 1937 I revisited Mount Brookville. The Norwegian spruce round the homes near the railroad station were as sturdy and opulent as in the old days, but the nine-mile swamp had empty spaces now on which the sun poured down as mercilessly as on an open field. There hasn't been the reckless destruction of the pine here as of the birch in the old village, yet it will need firmer resolve than the owners have yet displayed to resist the encroachment of the lumberman and the eventual destruction of this once magnificent stretch of wood.

Now that Jim is gone, his pine and cedar are also gone, and only

small growth has remained where once stately trees reared their heads to the sky. Were Jim to rise out of his grave he would scorch the earth with oaths for the deviltries the woodsman has perpetrated on "them fine pine and cedar" on his land. Perhaps, though, he would be content to remain where he is, for not only is his timber gone, but his once blooming farm is slowly turning into a wilderness. He left no sons or other kin who out of sentimental if not economic considerations might care to perpetuate the old homestead. It had been in the Hoyt family for generations, and now that the family has come to an end, its age-old sanctuary is likewise coming to an end.

No happier a fate has fallen on Clem Plummer's farm. Clem's wife left soon after his suicide, and his son died shortly after he was married, and no one remained to rescue the once flourishing acres and handsome home from devastation. The buildings were destroyed by fire, and only the gaunt and battered foundations remain. The spring out of which I had so often drunk as cool and refreshing water as I had ever tasted is so overgrown with weeds and brush and briars that it is difficult to find. The superb berry patch is likewise choked with alien growth. It was sad to behold these neglected trees and lands and even sadder to remember that at one time Clem and his wife and son had gotten an opulent living from them and had known an untrammeled and happy home life. Love had ruined it, and nature is rapidly wiping out all traces of former affluence and joy. It is choking out of view the very scars that the tragedy had left in its wake.

No more cheerful was it to contemplate Heinrich's untilled lands and his tumbling buildings. A bachelor to the end of his days, like most of his brothers, and with Fritz utterly lost to the world and Heinz with no love for the country and farm life, and the other brothers all dead, Heinrich's acres had for years remained unoccupied and untilled. Only recently has a tenant come to live on the place. Gone were the old luster and the old solicitude for land and home. The once sturdy maples and fir in the yard had been shattered and uprooted by storms, and the front porch of the spacious manorlike house is rapidly pulling away from its moorings. It was on this porch, splashed with sunlight, that Heinrich and Kate sat as Abner and I came up on the morning when Nell

Lonebeck died quietly in her bed. Only a young pear tree by the side of the road, richly loaded with fruit, remained to symbolize the former plentitude. The ground was yellow with fallen pears. I sat down, picked a few and ate them—large mealy pears that no one had bothered to pick. There was not even a cow or a pig around to clean them off the grass—only the yellow jackets sucking juice out of the bruised parts.

Time has worked havoc with many of the lands in Mount Brookville, especially on the hills. Whatever the cause—whether, as in the case of Jim and Heinrich, a man left no immediate heirs, or his heirs fled to the city, or whether the wild rush of the machine age and the moneyed economy it imposed made it impossible for him to whip a living out of his acres—the number of abandoned farms have cast a dark blur on the very geography of the country. The few far-away Poles and Lithuanians have fared better than the native-born Yankees. With their heritage of severe toil and privation, and with their women as able as the men to carry on the battle with nature, they stayed on the hills and have since reaped handsome rewards, as the fresh paint on their houses, the roar of the tractors on their lands, the fat hogs and sturdy Holsteins and Guernseys in their barns so eloquently testify.

Yet an end is rapidly coming to the desolation of abandoned lands. A new deal is reaching out to the far-away hills of Mount Brookville. For some time now crowds of energetic youths from near-by CCC camps have been setting them with white and Scotch pine and balsam, and unless an unforeseen catastrophe intervenes, someday these hills will bloom again, not with grass, corn, potatoes, other crops, but with dense and fragrant forests.

The boom of the machine age has stirred overwhelming changes in Mount Brookville. The automobile and the tractor are rapidly supplanting the horse. Hardly a farmer any longer carries his own milk to the station. Trucks pick up the cans, haul them away and bring them back empty and sterilized and ready to be filled again with milk. Good roads and gaudy motion-picture houses in the towns have wrought havoc with the old social gaieties of the village. Elder Jepson is gone. He left long ago for a different parish. With his departure the True Blues fell to pieces, and the "literary

programs" and debates that had enlivened their socials and the socials of the Ladies' Aid of the Baptist church, and had been a source of untold pleasure and talk for the community, are no longer held. The school continues to function, and on the eve of certain holidays and during commencement it favors the community with a literary program, but no one has ever bothered to stage a mock trial of a breach-of-promise or any other case in the Baptist church or anywhere else. The new pastor has no roots in the community. A worker in a shoe factory some sixty miles away, he drives back and forth to services and now and then to midweek prayer meetings. No longer of any use to the church, the vacant parsonage has recently been sold to a farmer, and never again will it resound with the peals of laughter and the earnest discussions that it knew in the days when Elder Jepson was its occupant.

Had the cheerful elder remained in Mount Brookville, it is doubtful that even he, with his abundant gifts of sociability, could successfully combat the temptations that good roads, the automobile, the radio and the other innovations of the machine age have flung upon the populace. But now Elder Jepson is only a memory. The pupils in the local school have not heard of him. At the post office he is rarely mentioned. He has left his mark only on the people who knew him and perhaps on no one so much as on me. From him and from his ministrations to the people in the community I learned for the first time in my life how unbounded could be the social tolerances and the personal kindliness of a Christian clergyman. It was also he who had introduced me to the New Testament and to the English version of the Old. Since then I have traveled far and wide over this earth, and I have never been without a King James version of the Bible. Like thousands of men in my profession I have found its lucid and majestic prose an inestimable help in my work. No wonder, then, that whenever I pass the parsonage or the church, the good elder rises before me, as vividly alive as he ever was in the evenings when he and I sat at the spacious desk in his study and planned together debates and "literary programs." Nor have other members of the True Blue class forgotten him. Whenever I happen to stop for the night or for a meal with any of them, we reminisce with no little enthusiasm of the old days and always in words of warm praise for the humble

and genial elder who did so much to enliven and to enchant the world in which we were living, and whose like the village had never known before and has never known since.

Had he remained in Mount Brookville, I doubt that he would storm as vehemently against dancing as he did in my days. In the new community hall across the street from his church, the public dances, to which young people from the surrounding country come as eagerly as they once did to the socials of the True Blues, would be a mockery of his denunciations. Loving life and people as much as he did, he would have met the sweep of new ideas with far less torment than other men in his position, less gifted than he in the appreciation of man's incessant search for fresh experience and fresh enjoyment.

I am certain the elder would have been pleased with the respect which the owner of the new saloon, a Lithuanian immigrant with grown and American-born children, and the only foreigner in the village, never fails to accord to requests of the new pastor, the deacon or some other worthy member of the church, that he keep his bar shut during special or solemn services. Such understanding between the church and the saloon marks a fresh epoch in the relationship of these two ancient rivals and bitter enemies.

The elder would have been equally pleased to learn that there is only one saloon in the village instead of the three that formerly prospered, and that the machine age, the movies, the propaganda during and since prohibition, and the fresh aesthetic appreciations that have been flung on the countryside, have robbed the institution of its physical ugliness and its sinister reputation. Little tables, chairs, a polished floor for dancing adjoin the bar, and young women neither hesitate nor are abashed to stop in with their escorts on Saturday evenings for a cocktail, a glass of beer, a round of dances. Of course they are from other parts of the country, chiefly factory or office workers from some far-away town. I doubt that any farm girl in Mount Brookville or in the neighboring countryside could be persuaded to drink a cocktail or a beer in the saloon or even at home. The new sophistications have not ground out of them their ancient dislike of any alcoholic beverage. Nor is there any longer an active feud between the good people and the saloon, which in the old days laughed at the goodness of all good people.

Times have changed, conditions have changed, people too have changed.

As I reached the crest of the hill that overlooks the center of the village, I saw an elderly man in the outlying valley stooping over a creek with a large plank. Since the land was part of John Roadsdell's farm, I concluded that it was John himself who was trying to build a little bridge over the creek. Nor was I wrong. Eighty-three years old, John is still a "glutton for work."

"You still find it hard to sit still, John," I said when I went over to see him.

He laughed uproariously, his sun-baked face and his large brilliant eyes as animated as ever.

"I guess so," he answered, laughing.

"D'you remember the time you decided to take a vacation and travel a bit and see the country?"

"I sure do."

"And d'you remember what happened when you got to Wisconsin?"

"I hain't forgotten," he answered and laughed again.

"When a man offered you a job to shingle a roof, you forgot you'd gone on a vacation and you got into overalls and went to work at two and a half dollars a day."

"I hain't bad at shingling a roof, you know," he answered with a sly wink.

"I guess you've never been bad at any job you've tackled."

"I've always done the best I could with anything I put my hands to," and he winked again, a boyish wink.

"You hain't yet ate your dinner, 'ave you?" he asked.

"I'm not hungry, John," I said.

"What d'you mean you hain't hungry? It's dinnertime, hain't it?"

The same old John, as regular with his dinner at eighty-three as ever he was with the milking of his superb herd of pure-bred Holsteins.

"I could cook you dinner here," he said, "but I guess we'd better go up to Bob's. Helen is a better cook than I am."

Bob was his older son, and Helen was Bob's wife. Both were at one time members of Elder Jepson's class of True Blues.

"I hain't had nobody livin' here but myself since the old lady died," John went on, "an' I ain't so fussy as she was about meals. But I can cook ham and eggs good enough for myself," and he laughed again. He didn't need to tell me that he wasn't as good a housekeeper as his wife. The disorder in the kitchen, especially on the stove, testified amply to that fact.

"Goin' to stay here long?" he asked.

"A few days."

"You'd better stay around a bit. You hain't been here in some time, an' folks 'll be kind o' glad to see you and visit with you."

"It's nice to get back," I said.

"We like it here all right," he said with pride, and after a pause he added, "I guess Bob and Helen can put you up, and if they can't you can stay here with me." Pointing with his eyes at the closed door of the parlor, he went on, "You can have the same room you've always had when you was visitin' us. I hain't touched nothin' inside, hain't never gone in there since the old lady's passed away, so I guess your room is made up same as always."

I looked at the door and, remembering the many happy evenings I spent there with John and his family whenever during my years at Colgate I came to Mount Brookville for a holiday, I felt a little shaky inside. This huge house, with its enormous porch, once so astir with talk and gaiety, was now almost deserted! I admired the cheerfulness with which John was taking his old age and the loss of companionship that is often the lot of a man of his years.

"Come on," he said, as he opened the door, "I'll go with you. There's been an awful pile of berries and apples round here this year, and Helen's been bakin' fresh pie every day. There hain't nobody bakes better pie than she does. Wait until you taste it. Come on," he repeated with a flourish of the hand, and we walked out into the street.

In the evening I walked into the village store, which is also the post office now. One glance at the walls sufficed to convince me that this once affluent trading center had come on lean times. The machine age that has revolutionized so much of the life of the community, especially its means of transportation, has drained the village store of the abundance which in the old days bulged out o

every shelf and every corner of the floor. No freshly oiled harnesses, with shiny brass and nickel clasps and buckles, hung down from rails overhead. With the coming of the tractor and the automobile, demand for harnesses dropped abruptly. No tiers of shoeboxes or cases of hardware beckoned to customers. Only a few pairs of overalls were on display, and in the windows only axe handles and milk pails. Farmers now make trips to the city and buy their merchandise there or continue, as in the old days, to send for it to Chicago mail-order houses or to one of their nearest branches. Yet there was one striking change in the display of goods—a conspicuous supply of canned foods, especially of meats.

"Do people buy a lot of canned foods?" I asked the storekeeper.

"They sure buy lots of canned corned beef," he answered.

Corned beef! Whence had come the sudden appetite for this humble food?

"They didn't used to, did they?"

"Not when you was around, but they sure do now. They eat lots of canned corned beef. It's good, too, and costs only twenty cents a pound, and there hain't no bones in it." A good enough reason for buying it, especially as prices of agricultural products are so ludicrously low—milk in winter three and a half cents a quart, eggs twenty cents a dozen, potatoes sixty cents a bushel, and apples no higher!

There were chairs in the store, more than in the old days because there was more space now. Some of the people in the chairs I knew, others I didn't.

"I'll bet you don't know who I am," said a man in white shirt sleeves, leaning back with his hands interlaced on his neck. His thick iron-gray hair, flashing dark eyes, large handsome features and soft voice gave him an air of distinction. He might have been the Professor, except that he was in shirt sleeves and that his large rough hands and sun-baked face bespoke a person who knew hard labor.

"Sorry I don't," I answered.

"When you were working for Jim I used to see you mornings at the milk station and tease you for going bareheaded in the coldest weather—remember now?"

His face grew increasingly familiar, but I couldn't think of his name. I was sure I hadn't seen him in the years since I had first left Mount Brookville.

"I guess I've grown old," he said with a touch of regret, "getting white already." After waiting for an instant he said, "Andy Marston—d'you remember now?"

"Of course I do!"

He was a brother of Glen Marston, the member of True Blues who died from double pneumonia, and my mind flashed back to the day when, together with other members of the class and Elder Jepson, I drove in a fierce blizzard to the funeral. Andy was so full-bodied now that even his bones seemed to have stretched. When I first knew him his hair was coal black.

"I've grown old, haven't I?" he repeated with a note of sorrow, even though he attempted to smile.

"Come over and spend the night with us," he said. "My wife and daughters are at prayer meeting, and as soon as they come out we'll be driving home."

"I can't tonight, Andy. I told Bob and Helen I'll stay with them. Can you make it tomorrow?"

"Sure, I'll come down and get you about eight o'clock right here in the store." After a brief pause he added, "I've got a lot to talk to you about." Eager and solemn and a little bitter, he was no longer the laughing, teasing, joyous Andy that I knew in the old days. His handsomeness and commanding personality only emphasized the gravity that had come over him.

The next evening, when I came down to the store, he was already waiting for me in his old automobile. He lived across the nine-mile swamp, and the moment we started driving he began asking questions, not of course about my inner life—he was Andy Marston, not Blind Sergey—but about my travels and the things I had seen in foreign lands. Obviously travel entranced him. Then, with pent-up feeling, he said:

"If you'd stuck around here on a farm you'd never have been able to see the world."

"Why not?"

"You'd never have made enough money, and if you had, the city

slickers would have taken it away from you." The vigor with which he spoke indicated that he had had a shattering experience with "city slickers," but being in Mount Brookville and not in the old village I made no effort to pry into the nature of the experience. Instead I said:

"Would you like to travel?"

"Would I!" he snapped out eagerly. "There's nothing I'd like better. I'd been thinkin' of it and plannin' on it all my life, and I could have too, if I hadn't been such a fool."

I gave a laugh.

"You a fool, Andy? You do make me laugh."

"Sure, I am a fool," he answered a little sharply. "If I hadn't listened to the city slickers I'd have sold my stocks in time and had thirty-five thousand dollars—and just think what I could have done with that much money! I could have gone to Florida and California and seen somethin' of the country and of how people in other parts are living. Yes, sir, I could have, but I lost it all. The city slickers saw to it that I'd lose it all right."

"I'm sorry to hear of your hard luck."

"Hard luck nothin'," he said impatiently. "They've ruined me, that's what they've done, these confounded city slickers. And I'm gettin' on in years too, and am not as strong as I used to be. Now that the children are grown up, if I'd had the money my wife and I could 've had the time of our lives—and don't think we wouldn't know how. Instead we've got to stick round the farm, and I've got to go on pullin' teats night and mornin' and be a slave to my cows same as I've always been."

Andy's protests and the passion with which he uttered them were something new in this village of pine. Jim, of course, had never ceased to rail at "city cheats." But Jim had never manifested a social restlessness. Andy did. He felt himself robbed not only of money but of the means of bringing to fulfillment a lifelong dream.

We arrived at the house, and even in the dark I could see that it was a superior home, bright with white paint and a spacious porch and large windows hung with neat curtains, set with flower pots, and overlooking the nine-mile swamp that was now swallowed in blackness. I complimented Andy on his beautiful home and on the

magnificent view it commanded. My words seemed to leave him unmoved, and he said nothing in reply.

We entered the house. Andy introduced me to his wife and his two daughters, girls of high-school age, with red cheeks and eager expressions in their full and round faces. We sat down and talked late into the night. They all wanted to hear of foreign lands and of how people live there. Not once did either Andy or his wife ask a question about the possibility of war or any of the vast political conflicts that are shaking the lands of Europe and Asia. It was people and everyday life that roused their curiosity.

Then Andy led me upstairs to the "spare room," and after bidding me good night he departed. The room was large and comfortable and homelike. The family photographs on the walls, the ancient dresser and the enormous wooden bed gave it an odor and a sanctity of age that were at first disconcerting.

In the morning Andy waked me. When I came down, he and the family had already gathered round the table. Having milked his cows and done all his other morning chores, Andy was obviously hungry, and even though I had not yet gone outdoors, the sight of the food stirred my appetite. There were fried eggs and bacon, griddle cakes, milk, coffee, biscuits, cookies, fried cakes and several kinds of homemade jams. In spite of his misfortunes in the stock market, Andy obviously enjoyed a comfortable home life. In the city only high-priced executives or businessmen with incomes in five figures might command a home and a table like his. All the more significant, I thought, were the words he had spoken the previous evening while we were driving to his farm. I expected to hear an elaboration of his protest, and my expectation was shortly fulfilled.

After breakfast he and I walked out of the house. The nine-mile swamp and the hills beyond were bathed in sunshine and in a haze of blue and rose and gold that dazzled the eye.

"I haven't seen a finer view," I said, "anywhere in the world."

"It's a fine view all right," said Andy coldly, and after a brief pause he added, "but it don't make up for other things."

Thereupon he drew a mouth organ from his pocket and, flashing it before me, inquired:

"Did you ever play one of them?"

"Never."

"I like to play on it once in a while," he said with a bright toss of the head, and instantly he started playing "Turkey in the Straw." He followed with "Dixie" and "Old Folks at Home" and other popular old tunes, and the more he played, the more animated grew his handsome features and the greater the brilliance of his large dark eyes as he now and then flashed them on me. His wife and daughters came out, sat down on the porch and listened.

"I never knew Andy was so musical," I said to his wife.

"We all love music in this family," she answered with a proud smile. She was a red-cheeked woman with wavy grayish hair and an amiable expression, and the two girls were almost an exact image of her. Andy played on and on. He seemed to brim over with pleasure, and it was good to see him forget his disappointments and torment and lose himself so blissfully in old tunes, now rollicking with gaiety, now throbbing with sentiment. Suddenly something seemed to snap inside of him, and he stopped playing. A shadow flitted across his face as he turned to me and said:

"Gosh, I wish I had sold those stocks."

"If you'd listened to me," said his wife, "you would have sold them."

"That only shows what a fool I was," he answered ruefully.

"There's no use worrying about it now, you've worried enough already."

The girls listened without saying a word and with visible sympathy for their father.

"I can't stop worryin', and I'm never goin' to stop, either. It just isn't right. After a man's worked as hard as I have all his life, he is entitled to time off so he can see the world and get to know people in his own country and visit with them and find out how they're livin' and what they're thinkin' of. Work isn't all there is to life, and Mount Brookville isn't the whole world. I'll bet"—he turned to me—"most of your friends in New York haven't even heard of it."

"Probably not."

"But there's not one of us here who hasn't heard of New York. And why shouldn't dirt farmers like me who's always done his own work have a chance to see the city that's drinkin' his milk and payin' him nothin' for it?"

"No use worryin' other folks with your troubles," said his wife gently. But Andy was too full of bitterness to stop.

"You see the game these city slickers are playin' on us dirt farmers? They find out we have a little money in the bank, and they come round and tell us if we'd buy the stocks they recommend we'd double and treble our money and then we could go to Florida and California and Yellowstone Park and other interestin' places. When we've got profits on our statements, they come again and tell us to buy more stocks or to trade the old ones for new ones, and what in the deuce do we dirt farmers know about stocks, anyway? They tell us we can't go wrong, because they know the insiders, and the insiders 've told them there are fortunes to be made in their stocks, and they pick up our statements and point to the profits we've made and tell us if they were right once they can't help bein' right again, and we get as greedy as they are. Yes, sir, we do—I did—and after they keep on talkin' like that we say go ahead, and when the crash comes they take it all away from us, every nickel we saved, and we have nothin' left and 've got to go on stickin' around the farm and bein' slaves to our cows the rest of our lives. Is that right? Tell me, is it?"

"We at least have our good home," said the wife by way of consolation.

"Don't we deserve it? Haven't we worked hard enough for it, every day of our lives, you in the kitchen, me in the barn and on the land, and aren't we entitled to a vacation, same as the city slickers, when we're as old as we are—aren't we?"—he turned to me, his eyes blazing with challenge and righteousness.

"Some folks haven't as good a home as we've got," said the wife again.

"It isn't right," he said, ignoring his wife's words, "you know it isn't, and these city slickers who ruin us and make us lose everythin' we have, every nickel we ever made by hard work, they know it, too. It isn't right, I tell you. Things like that have no business happenin', and it isn't right that folks like me and my wife should go on workin' the rest of our lives the same as we always had. It is no fun to be a slave to cows all your life."

Neither his wife nor children nor I made answer.

As I looked at Andy's blazing eyes and his set and handsome

features, I felt that I was hearing a new voice in these far-away hills, with an immense importance not only for Mount Brookville but for the country.

Before my departure from Mount Brookville, I went to take another look at Jim's farm. I walked around the fields that had once been clothed with hops and clover and timothy and oats and potatoes. It seemed as though it were only yesterday that I plowed and disked and planted and hoed and harvested here. Jim's person followed me everywhere, scolding, perpetrating little capers, telling stories, swearing explosively at the Republican party and discoursing with enthusiasm on bees and trees. In passing a clump of bushes at the edge of a field, I remembered that once, on a hot day after a hearty dinner, I felt so drowsy that I lay down in the shade and fell asleep. When I awoke I found a small rock on my chest. I had slept so soundly that I never had felt it. Later, when I came down to the barn for chores, Jim said:

"I guess ye don't like to be waked when ye fall asleep, do ye?"

"I am not as sound a sleeper as you think I am."

"Like hell ye hain't."

Then it dawned on me that it must have been he who had put the rock on my chest.

"Did you do it—put the stone on my chest?" I asked.

"There hain't nobody else round here who would."

"Why did you do it?"

He flashed his protruding eyes on me and said:

"So's to let ye know there hain't no use yer thinkin' ye can go to sleep when ye should be hoein' corn without my findin' it out."

Afterwards I was careful not to fall asleep in the field after dinner, even when I lay down for a brief rest in the shade.

I had worked for Jim nearly a year and a half, and in time his house and his farm had become almost a home to me. Never had I known him to accord privileges to himself at the table or in the house that he didn't share with me and the other hired man. Emphatic in speech and simple in mode of living, he had been to me, not only an employer, but a friend and a teacher. He wasn't much on book learning, but he more than anyone else had initiated me into the complexities of the American machine age and into

the folkways of American civilization. During the years that I was in college, and afterwards whenever I came to Mount Brookville, I always called on him, and I never left without gifts of honey and Northern Spies and Pound Sweets, the apples that he liked most.

Now the farm was as barren of fruit as it was of crops. There wasn't a single cow on it, not one horse, not one pig, and except for the house, the buildings were in a state of unimpeded collapse. Were Jim to peer out from under the shiny gray tombstone over his grave on the hillside overlooking this ruin, he would scream with horror. Eighty-five when he died, the best years of his life he had given to his land and everything that it grew and fed and housed, and now the fruits of his endless effort and solicitude were lost as completely as Andy Marston's money had been lost in the stock market.

But then, some bright morning, a crowd of khaki-clad CCC youths may descend on these lands with picks and shovels and set them out with pine and spruce and balsam. From year to year the trees will rise higher and higher. Someday they will rear their heads in the sky like "them fine pine and cedar" of which Jim was so inordinately proud. A dense forest round the little hillside cemetery in which he and Abner are buried would be a fitting tribute to the man who loved bees and trees perhaps a little more than human beings.

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